The Challenges of Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense

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The Challenges of Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Branch

of the Department of Defense

A Dissertation by

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ABSTRACT

The Challenges of Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense

by Ella Maria Nunley-Spaights

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders and the types of challenges they experienced while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employed to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense.

Methodology: This phenomenological study described the lived experiences of seven lesbian senior leaders serving in the army who retired from service within the past five years. Convenience and snowball sampling were utilized to identify women who met the criteria for participating in the study. Data collection consisted of in-depth interviews using a semi-scripted interview guide. The interviews were transcribed and reviewed for emergent themes to ensure the data collected aligned with the research questions.

Findings: The data analysis resulted in 11 themes mentioned 178 times describing the lived experiences of lesbian senior leaders in the army. Ten key findings and two unexpected finding were identified based on the frequency of references to themes by study participants.

Conclusions: The 10 key findings were summarized into conclusions which related to multiple variations of sexual orientation and gender discrimination, living in fear, sexual identity, being found out, equality after the repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, pressure to
compete with males, lack of support, looking out for each other, networking and mentorship, and covert and overt discrimination.

**Recommendations:** Future research should include a study focused on lesbian women in all branches of service, a study including gay males and transgender soldiers, and a study utilizing more of the female population in all branches of service.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Although women have made progress achieving gender parity in their quest to serve in the U.S. military over the last few decades, progress remains slow, especially among women identifying as lesbians. In the early 1900s, the women’s corps branch of the military was created to be providers for men at war (Gates, 2010). These gender roles played a significant part in the integration of women in the military. The first name that comes to mind when speaking of women in the military is Loretta Walsh, who was the first female enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1917. Although her enlistment was utilized to encourage more young women to enroll, it was the beginning of something significant with integrating women into the military (Gates, 2010).

According to Gates (2010), the 1950s started a shift in the U.S. economy as women entered the workforce. As of 2010, the U.S. labor force was comprised of 46.8% women (Gates, 2010). The proportion of women in the workforce increased from 33.9% in 1950 to 59.8% 1998 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000). These numbers show women’s progress across the U.S. over time and how they successfully received employment positions throughout the country in civilian and military employment. For example, in the 1950s, only one in three women were in the workforce, often working as nurses and secretaries. By the start of the 21st century, women gained equal access to the workforce. For example, Alaska has the highest female labor force rate, with 68.3% of women aged 16 and over working whereas West Virginia has one of the lowest rates with 49.3% working (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000).
The topic of women in leadership has been discussed for centuries. According to Bensahel, Barno, Kidder, and Sayler (2015), much attention was paid to gender dynamics in corporate America in recent years. Still, the literature leaves a significant gap concerning the experience of women serving as leaders in the military. During the Revolutionary War, women assumed roles as nurses and cooks, and some women disguised themselves as men to serve their country (Gates, 2010). Several women distinguished themselves during the Revolutionary War, and one of the most significant was Nancy Hart. She reportedly held British soldiers at gunpoint as a spy and was killed while working in Turkey. The Civil War was another war in which nearly 400 women secretly enlisted to serve as spies. Several other jobs women filled during wartime included telephone operators, office administrators, and secretaries. In 1941, the Women’s Army Corps (WAC) was formed and President Franklin D. Roosevelt made history by adding this new division as part of the army two years later. During this time, women had a wider variety of jobs. Although these jobs were not leadership positions, women could join the military and work in such areas as radio repair and air and ground support (Gates, 2010).

**Background**

**Women in the Military**

During World War II, women took the initiative to volunteer to help the war effort, which commonly became an effort to *free a man to fight* (Gates, 2010). The roles women assumed during this period were considered the first examples of leadership. This movement involved women taking responsibilities and jobs not recognized in the military as more men were on the front lines rather than serving behind a desk. One of
the top jobs women assumed during the war involved over 1,000 women flying aircraft for the WAC service pilots. In the WAC, women trained as pilots, tested aircraft, and trained other pilots (Gates, 2010).

The integration of women in the military triggered a variety of changes for women. The most crucial difference was serving in all service branches and participating in basic combat training alongside males. Gates (2010) noted several accomplishments for women during this early period of their induction in the military. In 1980, out of 119 women at West Point’s first integrated class, 62 graduated as second lieutenants, the lowest rank of commissioned officer in the army. By 1988, approximately 4% of women serving in the military were included in the three senior enlisted paygrades (E7-E9), which is the structure rating how people get paid for their military service. Once women could participate in military education while serving, they began to get promoted rapidly. Kristin Baker was the first woman chosen to serve as the Captain of the Corps of Cadets at West Point, which was impactful because no other woman had held such a command.

Many women serve in the military today. As of 2020, 7% of those serving in the Department of Defense (DOD) are women, of which 16% are enlisted and 19% are commissioned officers (Council on Foreign Relations [CFR], 2020). Drilling down to the women serving in the army, over 16.9% are women, of which 19% are officers, and 14% are enlisted. Included among the ranks of women serving in the military are lesbians. As of 2015, 22,945 lesbians were serving on active duty in the DOD and 7% of women in the army identified as lesbian (Kamarck, 2019).

An equal opportunity program (EOP) has been practiced for decades in the military since July 26, 1948, when President Harry S. Truman initiated the executive
order prohibiting discrimination based on national origin, race, religion, or color. To ensure everyone was treated equally regardless of sex, gender, race, and national origin, Truman maintained, “The fair involvement and leadership of women in decision-making processes at all levels and in all industries is therefore central to efforts to eliminate gender-based hardships” (Hoare & Gell, 2009, p. 9).

Research suggested life in the military for women is a difficult road to travel (Katzenberg, 2019). Gender inequality can affect women in all working environments. Krizsan (2005) listed a variety of hardships women could experience, including training drawbacks, a lack of access to expertise, and limited labor market opportunities. In contrast, equality can bring several positive gains within their families, businesses, and local communities. According to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research (as cited by Group, 2013), “Women are economically more excluded than men on virtually every global scale, women generally earn less than men, and legal discrimination is a remarkable common obstacle to women’s work” (p. 14).

**Lesbians in the Military**

In 1948, the Women Armed Service Act granted women permanent status in regular army and reserve units (Memorial, 2017). This Act later led to the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT) policy, which allowed lesbian and gay men to serve as long as they never disclosed their sexual orientation while serving. DADT allowed lesbians to serve in the military only if they never told anyone about their sexual orientation. DADT was incorporated on February 28, 1994, when the Clinton Administration endorsed the policy. In 2008, nearly 23,000 lesbians served on active duty and of that number, more than 30% were forced out of military service under DADT. From 1997 to 2009, the exodus of
women from the military jumped from 22% to 39% in 12 years (Memorial, 2017). These discharges indirectly caused women who loved and wanted to represent their country to find a new career direction. Regardless of their military occupation, they often could not get related jobs due to the reason behind some discharges. As a result of these large numbers of women leaving the military ranks, the DOD wanted to create an environment free of institutional barriers that hindered individuals from thriving to the highest positions possible. Seventeen years later on September 20, 2011, DATA was repealed, relieving stress for some while adding increased stress to others who did not want to disclose their sexual orientation (Memorial, 2017).

The army also faced inclusion and exclusion issues with women’s sexual orientation, which led to a rising concern for women seeking leadership positions. The DOD lifted restrictions on ground combat for women on January 24, 2013, with the goal of immediate implementation by all branches on January 1, 2016. In the armed forces today, women serve in the military’s most prestigious leadership positions including three- and four-star generals. In the enlisted ranks, women can achieve the rank of Command Sergeant Major, which is the highest rank an enlisted soldier can achieve in the army.

**Women in Leadership in the Military**

In 1917, Loretta Walsh became the first enlisted woman of the U.S. Navy (Memorial, 2017). Her enlistment encouraged some young women to follow in her footsteps. Her significance marked the beginning of women integrating the military. The incorporation of nurses into the military to provide medical treatment to men during times of war also opened doors for women to lead. In the early 1900s, a woman’s role in
the military consisted predominantly of nursing, leading to creation of the Army Nurse Corps, followed by the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908 (Memorial, 2017). Early on, young female soldiers struggled with finding role models due to the minimal number of women within the military ranks. However, General Ann Dunwoody was the first woman to make four-star general in 2008, and Lieutenant General Patricia Horoho became the first-ever female Surgeon General in 2011 (Memorial, 2017). Gender roles played a significant part in the progressive inclusion of women in the military.

**Theoretical Framework**

A review of the literature on lesbians in military leadership revealed few topics studied. Also, theories related to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons are often debatable and diverse. Given the limited research, three theories grounded this study relative to the barriers lesbian military leaders may experience based on their gender and sexual orientation. They are discussed briefly here and in greater depth in Chapter II.

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist philosophy derives from a variety of theories reflecting the diversity of women across the globe. Feminists developed unique ways to address issues dealing with humanity’s impact focusing on equality, social justice, and fairness for all. According to Jagose (1996),

Queer and feminist theories, like other perspectives based on social identities and gender, tend to overlap with each other. Both theories described responses to the “essentialization” of gender and sexual
identities that lead to the oppression of those who do not conform to
gender norms that are socially constructed. (p. 15)

Feminist ideas are often based on social, political, and cultural views. Although
many people incorrectly equate only females as calling themselves feminists, many
individuals currently share beliefs that women should be treated as equal to their male
counterparts. Feminist theories have their grounding in referencing women serving in the
military. The U.S. military continues to communicate and demonstrate policies,
practices, and protocols to ensure everybody receives a fair opportunity. The military has
multiple policies and procedures to promote equality, but the only program that protects
gender and sexual orientation is the EOP. Additionally, nowhere has feminism had more
of a presence than over the issue of women serving in combat. According to Berlatzki
(2013) in *The Feminist Objection to Women in Combat*:

While the change is undoubtedly and deservedly a win for feminism, it is
just as certainly a mixed one. On the one hand, the achievement of
equality for women in the military highlights just how successful
feminism in the United States has been in one of its primary goals—
achieving equality. As Jean Bethke Elshtain argued in *Women and War,*
military combat is, in some sense, the defining male role. Exclusion from
combat has, in turn, been one of the defining traits of femininity. A
military policy that recognizes women’s participation in, and capacity for,
combat is an essential assertion that people are not their gender roles. It
shows that women really can, and should be allowed to, do everything and
anything that men can. (p. 12)
**Queer Theory**

Queer theory was not identified until 1990 and is considered to be a homosexual slang term. Currently in the military, lesbians between the ages of 19-25 identify with the term *queer*. It derives from the idea of not placing one’s self in a bubble but having the opportunity to support things of one’s liking.

“Queer by definition is something at odds with standard legitimate, dominant; it is an identity without meaning, a critical theory field that emerged in the early 1990s from the fields of queer studies and women’s studies” (Jagose, 1996, p. 14). Queer theory allows an individual to identify with what is comfortable and, without using labels, present themselves in their own skin. Queer theory has various meanings, some of which consist of “methodology for analyzing literature, as well as productive theory practice” (Jagose, 1996, p. 12). Lastly, the queer model emphasizes sexuality and gender, although identities consist of multiple components. If identities are not fixed, they cannot be categorized (Jagose, 1996).

**Social Self-Preservation Theory**

Social self-preservation theory (SSPT) suggests people can measure their tolerance to social risk (Rohleder, Chen, Wolf, & Miller, 2008). The view of social self-preservation indicates something internal activates a psychological and physiological response when people encounter what they interpret as a social threat (Kemeny, Gruenewald, & Dickerson, 2004). Military regulations maintain everyone should be treated equally, but discrimination exists in all branches of service (Kamarck, 2019). Diminishing one’s self-worth can cause a person to feel ashamed, and these feelings are closely related with how someone views his or her social self (Pyszczynski,
Greenberg, & Solomon, 1997). Self-preservation is a fundamental survival instinct, meaning a person strives to achieve, sustain, and develop his or her own life. As a core characteristic of a human being, one must feel protected from harm and destruction. Self-preservation theorizes that a basic human impulse such as fear needs to be mitigated by something that could challenge it to safeguard oneself (Pyszczynski et al., 1997).

**Problem Statement**

Lesbians in the DOD encountered some undue hardships that contributed to the struggle to be part of the military’s senior ranks (Kamarack, 2019). There is speculation among some women’s studies that lesbians serving in the military experience a double challenge, that of being a woman and additional challenges of being lesbian. According to Kamarck (2019), the military does not track or disclose LGBTQ data. Furthermore, the U.S. Census office does not collect information on sexual orientation, ethnicity, or sexual behavior. However, survey data are typically used to estimate the size of the LGBTQ population within the U.S. and military.

Based on the 2015 National Health Related Behaviors Report, an estimated 3.9% of men and 16.1% of women in the military self-identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Lesbians in senior-level positions in the military are rarely discussed or acknowledged. Kamarck (2019) stated,

In some previous polls and focus groups, lesbian military women suggested that reasons for leaving service included perceptions of limited jobs, lack of career stability, long hours and shift work, and concerns about sexual harassment and family issues and responsibilities. (p. 4)
Although the DOD has lesbians in high-ranking positions, the struggles of gender discrimination and sexual orientation lack research on the challenges women endured getting to these senior-level positions.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders and the types of challenges they experienced while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employed to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What perceived challenges do lesbian senior leaders experience while serving in the army?
2. What strategies do lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome challenges experienced while serving in the army?

**Significance**

Lesbians have been systematically discriminated against and stigmatized when attempting to serve their country. “It is a bit paradoxical that lesbians who are treated as second-class citizens by their own country and government, with limited rights, want to risk their lives and possibly die for that same cause” (Sinclair, 2009, p. 15).

Sexual orientation is no longer a reason for military dismissal and the federal government, including the DOD, also grants government benefits for same-sex partners. Yet some veterans discharged from the military for LGBTQ are still struggling for a
switch in their discharge, impacting their ability to access healthcare coverage and find jobs. Repealing DADT did not end discrimination against members of the LGBTQ community serving in the military (Miller & Cray, 2013). Tammy Duckworth (n.d.), a retired veteran and Senator of Illinois, stated those willing and able to risk their lives for the United States should be allowed to regardless of their romantic preferences. Mishel (2016), explained,

> While employment discrimination based on LGBT identity has given rise in recent years to considerable scholarly and political interests, limited research has explored the hiring discrimination in the United States, and little to no study has directly investigated hiring discrimination against lesbians specifically. (p. 9)

The limited amount of research makes this topic important. Failure to concentrate on lesbians in previous U.S. employment discrimination studies may mean updating different theories and assumptions on the grounds of discrimination (or non-discrimination) against queer women because discrimination based on gender identity or sexual orientation may not be the same for LGBTQ people. Findings from this research on the challenges lesbian senior leaders face in the military are vital for educating and raising awareness of the strategies lesbians use to overcome these obstacles. Lesbian senior leaders in the military may be provided with new information to help them deal with the discrimination they face as they navigate their leadership careers.

The real-life experiences shared by other lesbians serving in the military could shed light on perceived discrimination and how they managed to deal with obstacles set before them as lesbians. Little to no research discusses lesbians in the DOD. The
findings of this research could foster the development of lesbian mentorship programs and heterosexual women mentorship programs that speak to all women’s needs. Additionally, this research could facilitate an environment to educate military leaders, politicians, educators, and other leaders in the country at all levels.

This history is especially true for lesbians in the military who need to know about other lesbians’ situations and challenges. Hopefully, current lesbians can become aware of different eras when things were difficult and learn how lesbian senior leaders managed through obstacles. Little research discusses lesbians in the DOD or discrimination they faced due to their gender and sexual orientation.

**Definitions**

The following definitions and terms are used throughout this study, which define the Military’s terminology and terms to describe women.

**Military Terms**

**Basic Combat Training.** The integration and introduction to the army in which a person spends over nine weeks learning tactics, traditions, and methods of becoming a soldier. The focus of the training is on team building and basic rifle marksmanship.

**Cadet.** Trainee currently attending college who wishes to experience the nature of day-to-day life in military during their summer break.

**Captain.** The commander of a company or subordinate officer commanding under a general.

**Commissioned Officer.** An officer of the armed forces holding a commission rank of second lieutenant, ensign, or above.
**Court-Martial.** A general court-martial is sometimes represented as a felony court, and all UCMJ subjects, including enlisted members, officers, and midshipmen, can be tried.

**Department of Defense (DOD).** An executive branch department of the federal government charged with coordinating and supervising all government agencies and functions directly related to national security and the U.S. Armed Forces (Army, 2014).

**Dishonorable Discharge.** Of all military discharges, this is the most punitive and issued as a consequence of a court-martial.

**Don’t Ask Don’t Tell.** The policy on military service by bisexuals, lesbians, and gays instituted by the Clinton administration (Army, 2014).

**Enlisted.** Armed forces member who have not attained the rank of an officer.

**Honorable Discharge.** The highest discharge received by a service member who performed tasks well, conducted the mission diligently, and was an asset to the military branch served.

**Junior.** Enlistee or officer in the lowest operational category of ranks.

**Second Lieutenants.** Junior commissioned officer in the Armed forces.

**Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ).** The legal framework of all military members.

**West Point.** The United States Army Military Academy.

**Equality Terms**

**Discrimination.** Any action that unlawfully or unjustly results in unequal treatment of persons or groups based on race, color, gender, national origin, or religion.
**Equal Opportunity.** The right of people to participate in and benefit from programs and activities for which they are qualified. People are evaluated on individual merit, fitness, and capability, regardless of race, sex, origin, or religion (Army, 2014).

**Gay.** Relating to sexual or romantic attraction to the same sex.

**Gender Discrimination.** The action taken by an individual to deprive a person of a right because of his or her gender. Such discrimination can occur overtly, covertly, intentionally, or unintentionally (Army, 2014).

**Gender Dynamics.** Social cultural ideas about gender and the power of building relationships.

**Gender Inequality.** A basic acknowledgment that men and women are not equal.

**Gender Parity.** Primary a statistical measure showing numerical values of male to female and boy to girl ratios.

**In Queer Spaces.** Locations were mostly gay communities mingle and create or indirectly create a designated space (Jagose, 1996).

**Lesbian.** A woman who is sexually and romantically attracted to other women.

**Lived Experiences.** The experience or choice of a person and what he or she learned from these given experiences.

**National Origin.** An individual’s place of origin or that of an individual’s ancestors. The term also applies to a person with the physical, cultural, or linguistic characteristics of a national group (Army, 2014).

**Race.** A division of human beings identified by the possession of traits transmissible by descent, which is sufficient to characterize persons who possess these traits as a distinctive human genotype (Army, 2014).
**Sexual Orientation.** A person’s identity in relation to the gender or genders to which they are sexually attracted.

**Sexual Orientation Discrimination.** The action taken by an individual to deprive a person of a right because of his or her sexual orientation. Complaints may be based on actual or perceived sexual orientation and association with an individual or affinity group associated with a particular sexual orientation. (Army, 2014).

**Unlawful Discrimination.** Any action that unlawfully or unjustly results in unequal treatment of persons or groups based on race, color, sex (including gender identity), religion, national origin, or sexual orientation (Army, 2014).

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are variables that narrow the scope of a study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To narrow the scope, this study was delimited to lesbian senior leaders in the army who were honorably discharged or retired from active military duty within the past five years.

**Organization of Study**

This study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provided a foundation for the study and included the historical and current context of lesbians in the military, the research problem, significance of the study, purpose statement, and research questions. Chapter II includes a literature review related to lesbians in the military and their challenges and theoretical framework relative to lesbians. Chapter III outlines the research design, population, and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter IV describes the findings from the synthesis of interviews. Lastly, Chapter V concludes this dissertation by sharing conclusions and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Women Belong in all places where decisions are being made.
- Ruth Bader Ginsburg, U.S. Supreme Court Justice

This chapter presents literature related to this study’s purpose, which was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders about the types of challenges they experience while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense (DOD). In addition, strategies lesbian army leaders employ to overcome perceived challenges are explored. The literature review addresses women’s history in leadership and the roles women play while serving in leadership positions. A focus on lesbians serving in military leadership positions is addressed, coupled with discrimination, laws, and sexism faced while serving in a male-dominated arena. In this review, an additional focus is placed on the challenges and barriers lesbians and lesbian senior leaders encounter in the work environment and serving in the U.S. Army. An explanation of how lesbian senior leaders overcome many obstacles and remain successful in military careers is also presented. Finally, the literature addresses lesbian accomplishments, percentages of leaders affected by Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT), and strategies lesbian military leaders use to build and sustain a successful military career.

History of Women in Leadership Roles in the Military

Women served in the military in many different roles and various jurisdictions throughout history. Eleanor Roosevelt opened doors for women leadership in American society. As the wife of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, she utilized her platform as First Lady to accomplish personal goals and not shy away from disagreeing with her husband. The independence she displayed began opening the doors for other women aspiring to lead, such as Hilary Clinton who was the first woman to run for president for a major
political party. Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton are early examples of independent women taking the lead in history.

Hill, Miller, Benson, and Handley (2017) stated the study of women in leadership can be categorized into four parts. Part one involves women in an evolving society, focusing on gender stereotypes, values, and beliefs. The second part of women in leadership concentrates on women and social change, with a focus on gay and lesbian equality and voting rights. Part three details women in politics who obtained leadership roles at high levels. Lastly, part four defines the spectrum of leadership focused on women in business, sports, arts, and literature (Hill et al., 2017). These four parts concentrate on changes considered significant in women’s leadership progression within the United States, painting a picture of how women evolved at so many levels.

Women have served within the armed forces since the American Revolution. Women often had to portray themselves as men to serve their country (Hill et al., 2017). During the Civil War, these women served at the front lines of the Union and Confederate armies; they initially could not be themselves but to represent their country, they depicted themselves as men. As time passed, during World War I women received other positions within the Armed Forces, such as nurses and typists. “Women in their search for equality within the military endured many roadblocks, magnified during marriage and childbearing periods. Women were required to quit the military upon becoming married or pregnant” (Shields, 1985, p. 7). This requirement disqualified many women from serving and attaining available leadership positions.

Social norms leading to women’s stereotype as homemakers led to their husbands being allowed to serve while women were charged with maintaining the home (Shields,
1985). There were moments when women were allowed to continue to serve if they were deemed a necessity or asset to the military. Women who met the specific requirements were able to fill positions that would benefit the organization’s needs (Shields, 1985).

**Civilian Workforce Versus Military Workforce**

On June 5, 1920, the Department of Labor incorporated the Women’s Bureau, a prominent organization during World War I (Priddy, 2018). In response to the vacant industry and factory positions needing to be filled in the absence of men serving in the war, the Women’s Bureau was established, allowing women to work in manufacturing and factories. Another major factor in the 1920s was women earning the right to vote after the 19th amendment was adopted. Studies revealed women had the potential to pursue a multitude of career opportunities, from voting rights to having the freedom to serve in various roles. As a result, “women were more likely than previously in history to fill a wider spectrum of positions where positions were nonexistent” (Priddy, 2018, p. 6).

In 1945, women in the labor force grew to 19 million, which represented 36.1% of the labor force (Priddy, 2018). The workforce increase provided women with various positions and expertise needed for multiple jobs during World War II. At the conclusion of World War II, women wanted to maintain their current positions and not return to the traditional duties and jobs before the war (Hobler, 2011). As a result, women pushed hard for the Equal Pay Act to allow them to hold the same positions as men and receive the same pay for doing the same jobs. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 was enacted, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was established to stop gender and ethnicity discrimination. Together, “Proponents of these Acts hoped that once the doors of workplace opportunity
opened for women, they would, in a short time, acquire the requisite experience to rise to positions of prominence in American business” (Habler, 2011, p. 12).

From the early 1950s until the year 2000, women joined the workforce at impressive rates. The boom into the workforce started with World War II because women were needed to fill positions as men went to war (Hartmann, 1982). In 1944, the female labor force increased by 6.5 million, with 37% of adult women working outside the home. Approximately 19,170,000 women were in the labor force during the war. Between 1940 and 1945, the female labor force increased by 50% (Hartmann, 1982). Although women were abundant in the workforce, few if any women assumed leadership positions. For example, in 2018 only 5.2% of chief executive officers of Fortune 500 organizations were women (Warner, Ellmann, & Boesch, 2018). Women comprise nearly half of the U.S. labor force and earn more bachelor and master’s degrees than men; however, from corporate boards to politics, healthcare, non-profit organizations, and higher education, men are much more likely to rise to the highest and most prestigious positions of authority. In 2018, 23% of Senate seats and 24% of House of Representative seats were held by women (Warner et al., 2018).

Diversity in the Workplace

Workplace diversity is the term used for the workplace composed of employees with varying characteristics, such as different sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Pew Research Center, 2015). Some contend diversity in the workforce contributes to creativity. When a large group of homogeneous people exist, everything from their thought habits to personal experiences and problem-solving skills may also be similar. Workplace diversity refers to an organization that deliberately employs a
workforce comprising people of different sexes, religions, races, ages, ethnicities, sexual orientations, education backgrounds, and other attributes (Pew Research Center, 2015).

Workplace diversity contributes to a variety of advantages, both internally and externally (Pew Research Center, 2015). A new variety of viewpoints are brought to the table when organizations recruit people from various backgrounds, nationalities, and cultures. Diversity in the workplace can bring advantages such as improved problem-solving and enhanced productivity. Diversity and inclusiveness go hand in hand. Building a working atmosphere in which workers see a range of cultures, experiences, and ways of thinking results in a work culture in which people are more relaxed and become diverse at work. Companies can perform better because they can understand different perspectives, tap into other markets, and make better choices that accurately reflect the society in which they operate (Pew Research Center, 2015).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population’s cultural composition will change in the next 30 years. By 2060, as the population decreases, non-Hispanic White citizens will comprise less than 44% of the population (Amadeo, 2020). The U.S. population will no longer be predominantly White, which will result in increased diversity across neighborhoods and workplaces. Some economists believe this change in the U.S. population structure will also have a significant impact on the economy (Amadeo, 2020).

Equal Opportunity

According to the DOD (2020), every soldier has the right to participate in and benefit from qualified programs and activities. These programs and activities should be free from social, personal, or institutional barriers that prevent people from rising to the
highest possible accountability level. People are evaluated on individual merit, performance, and potential, regardless of race, color, sex (including gender identity), national origin, religion, or sexual orientation, except as prescribed by statute or other service policy (DOD, 2020).

Justman and Mendez (2018) noted several implicit beliefs and theories about women and their importance that helped perpetuate the wage gap, such as women historically taking lower-paying jobs. They indicated this happens when managers have prejudices or perceptions toward a particular category of people affecting their hiring decisions, such as believing women are best suited for childcare or customer service work (Justman & Mendez, 2018).

During the last half-century, social scientists documented dramatic gender inequality changes, sometimes called a gender revolution. The shift toward gender equality between 1970 and 2018 indicated dramatic improvement, although reforms slowed in recent decades (England, Levine, & Mishel 2020). The slowdown on some indicators and stagnation on others suggest substantial institutional and cultural change is required for further progress. England et al. (2020) noted progress would require men to take on greater responsibilities related to household and childcare work, as well as policies aimed at reducing gender discrimination.

Warner et al. (2018) reported about the number of women in leadership positions across various sectors. In education, only 32% of professors and 30% of college presidents are women, despite women earning 57% of bachelor and 59% of all master’s degrees awarded. Among Fortune 500 companies, 12.5% have women as the chief executive or chief financial officer. In finance, women hold 53% of financial manager
positions but only 37% of analyst positions. In politics, 24% of House of Representatives and 23% of Senate seats were held by women (Warner et al., 2018).

**Leadership Identity**

The Military Cadet leadership model involves people interested in joining the army after college who graduate as a commissioned officer. The Leadership Identity Development (LID) model offered by Cadet Command was important for understanding how the perception of self as a leader by cadet women changed over time. LID was developed by Komives, Owen, Longerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) and defined six phases through which students pass as they build a leadership identity. These phases create a blueprint for understanding the creative process of leadership identity. An essential condition to consider when applying the LID model is the role identity plays in recognizing the experience of creating a student’s leadership identity (Komives et al., 2005).

College student leadership research aligned with more extensive women leadership research in that college-aged women associate with conventional feminine leadership types. This leadership style alignment raises obstacles for women as they explore leadership (Haber-Curran & Sulpizio, 2017). The bulk of empirical research on the leadership of college women concerns leadership styles.

Although the literature helps explain the remarkable consistency between women’s leadership and women’s leadership in college, there is currently a gap in empirical research related to creating a women’s leadership identity. College leadership development research clearly shows students align with findings from more general studies. Women identify most readily with traditional feminine styles of leadership and
experience similar barriers. However, there is a shortage of research describing the process by which women develop leadership identity.

**Challenges Women Face**

As women develop a view of themselves as a leader, the environment, particularly a traditional military environment, can affect and present challenges for women (Anderson & Buzzanell, 2007; Boyce & Heard, 2003). The environmental and organizational structure affects a woman’s desire to assume leadership (Anderson & Buzzanell, 2007). For military women, leadership obstacles are further complicated by gender roles, stereotypical risks, and pressures from a male-dominated environment. The military maintains gender roles related to job positions and expectations, including leadership positions and assignments in war zones (Archer, 2012). Thus, gender stereotypes are barriers for advancement and retention in the military.

**Gay-Related Stress**

In addition to life events, another type of stress for lesbians, called gay-related stress, is important to consider. The concept of minor stress, derived from various social and psychological theories, has been defined as a condition from which lesbians suffer (Brooks, 1981). “Culturally recognized, categorically inferior status, social bias and prejudice, the effect of these environmental factors on psychological well-being, and consequent readjustment or adaptation” all play a role for stress levels (Brooks, 1981, p. 107). Meyer (1995) believed that “minority stress emerges not just from negative incidents but also from the value of the experience of the minority individual in the dominant society” (p. 39).
Gay or lesbian-related stressors can also affect physical well-being. In many areas of disease, internalized homophobia plays a crucial role as a precipitating factor, which can influence disease development and decision-making processes related to the prevention of one’s health and disease (Williamson, 2000). McGregor (as cited by Williamson, 2000) found internalized homophobia correlated with more significant distress in breast cancer-adjusting lesbians.

Studies of LGBTQ people typically reported significantly higher rates of attempted suicide and suicidal ideation than among heterosexuals (Suicide Prevention Resource Center [SPRC], 2014). The authors reported the higher suicide rate among the LGBTQ community cannot be determined unequivocally because information on sexual orientation was not included on death certificates. SPRC (2014) noted greater suicidal ideation rates and attempts for LGBTQ veterans than heterosexual veterans.

Inclusion

Women were prohibited from participating in units or jobs involved in active ground fighting by the DOD for decades (Kamarack, 2019). The Direct Ground Fighting and Assignment Law, which excluded women from assignment to units below the brigade’s level whose primary task was to participate in direct ground combat, was rescinded in 2013 by the DOD. This regulation affected women from assignments to certain professions and units of fighting arms. As with racial and ethnic groups, since the Civil War women played a part in promoting and serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. However, over the history of service, laws and regulations concerning how many women can serve, their permitted benefits, and types of assignments changed. Although the limit on the percentage of women permitted to serve in the military was abolished in 1967,
women continued to be barred by law and policy from serving in many occupations until 2013, especially those related to fighting arms (Kamarack, 2019).

**Exclusion/Isolation as Service Women and Veterans**

Servicewomen are mindful of their visibility as a minority when in uniform and their veteran invisibility (Goldstein, 2018). Being a woman in the military is to struggle with coexisting identities dissonant with conventional gender norms. It is to live with the greatest empowerment yet feel alone, invisible, and ignored both by the organization and by the community in which they are sworn to protect. This dissonance is why they tend not to self-identify as veterans, as many women leave the military. Mary, a veteran of the Navy, reflected,

> Many male veterans do not remember us as veterans, but as service additions who happen to be there. I hope this will improve. It’s subjective, I understand. One thing I want for myself is that women have no respect for what they do. Not in service, and not in service after service. (Goldstein, 2018, p. 4).

When addressing their service, female veterans are often caught in a double bind because of the presumption women are not combat veterans, disbelief if they are, and devaluation of their service, often written off as not true veterans (Goldstein, 2018). For many, the glorification of combat service is perceived as the only true service. This perception is problematic for several reasons. First, most male veterans have not participated in direct combat and second, women veterans are faced with a unique challenge in that they do not define their military service as participating in combat. These women face the challenge that many civilians do not recognize women who served as veterans due to their lack of combat service (Goldstein, 2018).
**Bullying and Harassment**

Bullying is a deliberate misuse of power between the bully and one or more direct reports (McSween, 2020). This bullying affects the working relationship between the leader and workers and undermines trust within the group. Ultimately, it has a significant adverse effect on the organizational unit’s efficiency. McSween (2020) noted bullying from a supervisor or among peers might cause workers to feel nervous, depressed, or terrified; lose sleep; experience headaches and stomach aches; generate self-doubt and frustration; and lead to post-traumatic stress syndrome.

Women in leadership reported experiencing sexual harassment 30-100% more than lower-level female employees (Picchi, 2020). Harassment may include offensive jokes, slurs, physical violence, bullying, insults, and unwanted sexual advances. Sexual harassment can be targeted at one’s gender, sex, or sexual orientation. Women face a paradox of power because rising higher in the leadership ranks put them at greater risk for experiencing sexual harassment (Picchi, 2020).

**Lesbians in the Workplace**

Challenges for LGBTQ employees continue to persist despite initiatives to address inequities (Cross, 2019). Substantial initiatives have been implemented by private and public sector organizations to ensure LGBTQ staff feel included and supported, recognizing productivity is related to staff being themselves in the workplace. However, some felt their identity as a woman was a more significant concern than their identity as a lesbian. Cross (2019) surmised this was because one’s gender is typically presented outwardly whereas one’s sexual orientation is easier to conceal, which also resulted in many lesbians hiding their sexual preferences. However, this also made
lesbians less noticeable, potentially undermining their contributions. Cross (2019) also cited a 2018 McKinsey report that found 71% of lesbians faced microaggressions and overheard disparaging remarks about themselves or lesbians in general. Some lesbian leaders explained their experiences helped them leverage their identities to impact business. Cross (2019) also quoted Monica Boll who stated,

> While I love being surrounded by our community, I continually ask, ‘where are the women?’ Whether it is a LGBT+ professional conferences or networking events, LGBT+ fundraisers for various causes (homeless youth, AIDS, elders, etc.) or Human Rights Campaign events in New York, Atlanta, and Washington, DC, there is always an imbalance of women. Women need to ‘come out’ to support, inspire, and be more visible in the community. (p. 11)

Mishel (2016) conducted a study in which similar resumes were submitted in response to job openings, but with some resumes including a LGBTQ indicator. She found those with the LGBTQ indicators received 30% fewer callbacks than women without such an indicator (Mishel, 2016).

**Lesbian Leaders**

Lesbian senior leadership is defined as formal organizational leadership positions held by lesbians in any organization, and lesbian acts that provide leadership in dealing with heterosexism or homophobia (Greene, 2007). This mix of leadership concepts is based, in part, on the discussion of the socially constructed existence of the lesbian mark. The fundamental distinction between women who consider themselves heterosexual and those who consider themselves lesbians is their relationship with homophobia and
heterosexism and their experience, making sense to focus on individual acts that resolve heterosexual behavior (Greene, 2007). Simultaneously, given that leadership’s task creates challenges and choices that arise from heterosexism and homophobia, all leadership positions are considered relevant.

Lesbians made history with numerous contributions to politics, literature, medicine, the arts, and a host of other areas (Aviles, Jao, & Sopelsa, 2020). For example, during the Harlem Revival, Gladys Bentley sang the blues wearing a top hat and tuxedo. Aviles et al. (2020) reported The New York Times referred to Bentley as “Harlem’s most famous lesbian” and “among the best-known black entertainers in the United States” (para. 5). Similarly, Stormé DeLarverie started as a horse jumper with the Ringling Brothers Circus, but later toured the Black theater circuit as its only drag king. DeLarverie’s community and volunteer work earned her the title of “guardian of lesbians in the Village” (Aviles et al., 2020, para 7).

**Sexual Orientation and the Law**

Sexual orientation is a persistent attraction to another person (Human Rights Education Association [HREA], 2003). By focusing on another person, it differs from biological sex and gender orientation that focus on the self. Sexual orientation includes heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. Heterosexuals prefer members of the opposite sex, homosexuals prefer members of the same sex, and bisexuals are attracted to members of either sex (HREA, 2003).

Federal policy and laws play a significant role in determining who is safe from discrimination in jobs. After the 1970s, many states outlawed discrimination based on sexual orientation or provided sexual orientation guarantees for all workers in their

Three states, Utah, Kansas, and Maryland, only have sexual orientation as a covered identity in their law on workplace discrimination (McAnallen, 2015). President Obama signed Executive Order 11478, banning harassment by federal employers and federal agencies on the grounds of sexual identity. When Congress passed Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, it aimed to provide equitable work opportunities for all people. The Act forbids employers from discrimination on the grounds of color, religion, ethnicity, national origin, age, disability, or pregnancy (McAnallen, 2015). In 2015, the U.S. Army added sexual orientation to the basis of discrimination, stating,

Sexual orientation as one’s emotional or physical attraction to the same and or opposite sex (homosexuality, bisexuality, or heterosexuality).

Complaints may be based on actual or perceived sexual orientation, as well as association with an individual or affinity group associated with a particular sexual orientation. (DOD, 2019, p. 12)

Federal laws exist to safeguard against discrimination in the workplace based on ethnicity, sex, national origin, age, faith, reproductive status, and disability (Pantekoek, 2020). In the 2020 Bostock v. Clayton County Supreme Court case, the Court ruled discrimination based on sex included discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Numerous actions were adopted in the United States since the Supreme
Court ruling of 2020. Congress has since comprised several iterations of the Non-Discrimination Jobs Act and the Equality Act (Pantekoek, 2020).

**Lesbian Leaders in the Military**

“On January 24, 2013, DOD rescinded the ground combat restrictions for women, with the expectation that full implementation by the services would occur on January 1, 2016” (Kamarack, 2019, p. 10). By 2020, women hold some of the highest positions in the military. Brigadier General Stefanie K. Horvath is the highest-ranking, openly gay woman in the Minnesota National Guard. Major General Tammy Smith was the U.S. Army’s first openly gay general serving in South Korea at Camp Yongsan. She came out once promoted in 2012. Smith outlined her journey that underscored the tremendous hurdles the LGBTQ community faced in the U.S. military. For example, the DOD previously prohibited gays from joining the military, but in 1993 DADT was enacted allowing gays to serve as long as they did not express their sexual orientation, which seems like progress at the time (Fichtl, 2017). On November 14, 2008, Army Lieutenant General Ann Dunwoody broke another barrier by becoming the first woman to be promoted to the highest grade of O-10 (General or Admiral) in the military (Bensahel et al., 2015). Three other women, U.S. Air Force Generals Janet Wolfenbarger and Lori Robinson, and Navy Admiral Michelle Howard, were also promoted to the four-star general rank (Bensahel et al., 2015).

Major Adrianna Vorderbruggen of the U.S. Air Force was well known for her support of repealing DADT (Memorial, 2017). One day short of the fifth anniversary of the DADT repeal, she was killed in Afghanistan. She was the first openly gay woman to die in battle in 2015 and the first openly gay woman to die in air force fighting.
Memorial (2017) mentioned many LGBTQ troops gave their lives in service to the country and “due to the abolition of DADT, their families will be remembered rather than veiled in the shadows” (p. 13).

**Theoretical Framework**

Understanding social theory helps explain how lesbians perceive themselves in the world and especially as high-level leaders in the military. The various theories related to feminism, gender theory, and self-preservation in the high stakes world of serving in the military as a lesbian leader can help explain how lesbians have existed and thrived in a male-dominated military arena. Three theories in particular helped explain lesbian military leaders as they intersect between the challenges and barriers faced while serving.

**Feminist Theory**

Feminist theory means to have fair treatment in all facets of society, and in military organizations, women must choose to become active participants in all areas of the military (Brunner, 2013). It supports the constructivist perspective of gender. However, feminist theory agrees with the claim of civic responsibility that certain fundamental physical differences exist between men and women. According to Brunner (2013), women should not be required to work in positions in the military involving firearms. However, if they meet the profession’s criteria, they should be able to participate voluntarily. Although it would be helpful for feminism to be seen as equally important in the military for typically female employment, as put forward by the claim of civic duty, there is a considerable focus on the significance of combat roles in the current military institutional order (Brunner, 2013).


**Queer Theory**

Queer theory can encourage people to challenge the dynamics of military conflict; physical disability research can inflect understanding of injury with nuanced ways of reading (and the experiences of those bodies) the non-normativity of systems in social, political, and material contexts (Wool, 2014). Furthermore, for these unbounded opportunities, both routes will work. Although this is a partial picture, it is a significant one that addresses the organization of military life in the United States and the normative social forces and policies of moral intimacy that exist within and outside it, the issue of which is at the heart of queer theory. The military is an organization that amplifies, projects, and is profoundly invested in exemplary normative forms, especially those aimed at gender embodiments. Therefore, the conjugal couple’s normative power at the core of the army family image does not belong exclusively to the army (Wool, 2014).

Queer theory has done much to explain how this constructs public and political life in the contemporary U.S., aligning the good life, or maybe even life worth living at all, with heteronormative modes of reproduction and sociality (Berlant & Warner, 1995; Edelman, 2004; Haritaworn, Kuntsman, & Posocco, 2013).

**Social Self-Preservation Theory**

In its simplest sense, self-preservation defines both the collection of behaviors by which individuals strive to maintain their own life and the psychological mechanisms that determine these behaviors (Freud, 1910). Freud (1910) correlated sexual impulses with these behaviors. He believed a human’s life was influenced by two major forces, (1) instincts of self-preservation by which people maintain their existence, and (2) sexual instincts by which they ensure the species’ survival. The theory notes that individuals
seek to preserve their social selves, including their level of social hierarchy (social status) and how much others respect them (social esteem) and support them (social acceptance; Gruenewald, Dickerson, & Kemeny, 2007).

The Service Member Legal Defense Network (as cited by Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2010) indicated LGBTQ service members were skeptical about participating in Network research (before 2010) because of the ban of LGBTQ citizens from openly serving in the military is still in place. New legislation and media coverage could increase LGBTQ service members being outed and discharged. It would seem that circumventing any research efforts would have been necessary for self-preservation unless confidentiality could be guaranteed. Moreover, it seems clearer now the DADT policy is, by its very existence, a contraindication to LGBTQ service member research and associated victimization cases. When thinking of lesbians in the army, questions about self-preservation include what they are trying to hide and what do they fear. This theory is critical because after DADT was repealed, some women were still afraid to be themselves due to overt or covert discrimination. These behaviors caused women to be uncomfortable in the workplace (HRW, 2010).

Some LGBTQ service members continued to hide who they were from the individuals they trusted with their lives, despite DADT’s abolishment. In some cases, it meant a life that was less than whole (HRW, 2010). It meant significant others would not be there to celebrate a new rank because homosexual couples were looked down on or felt insecure at work. DADT allowed these activities to be feasible but was not as accommodating as it seemed. For example, when something terrible happens to a solider, same-sex partners have no rights and may not be contacted about the incident (HRW,
2010). After DADT’s repeal, whether the service member’s partner would still earn benefits continued to be a point of contention (Ocamb, 2019).

Leadership Culture in the Military

The gender-role stereotype, which also affects people’s understanding of their leadership behavior, was described by Martell, Parker, Emrich, and Crawford (1998) as the most significant challenge women leaders faced in their work environments. The words stereotype and gender-role relate to the women who were historically over-generalized and stereotyped by individuals in a society or a unique group of people (Northouse, 1997). Some of the misconceptions include women do not work as hard as men; women cannot work overtime or tolerate unusual working hours; women are too emotional, not aggressive, or not aggressive enough; women change their minds and are indecisive (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999).

Such gender-role assumptions contribute to a classification that emphasizes the male as a more capable leader. Previous studies found most people assume anyone with male or neutral sex characteristics should be a leader or manager, although most women agree both feminine and masculine characteristics are essential to becoming a good leader or manager (Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999). Additionally, males typically have unfavorable views of female leaders (Deal & Stevenson, 1998; Everett et al., 1996; Gardiner & Tiggemann, 1999).

Barriers Faced by Women Leaders in the Military

Women face misconceptions about who they are and how they perform their duties effectively (Trobaugh, 2018). These behaviors and views challenge both the dignity and purpose of the armed forces. The army must overcome the following
challenges to effectively integrate women leaders into many job fields: inconsistent application of existing expectations and double-standard perceptions, instances of unprofessional actions and indiscipline, fear of sexual harassment and assault, cultural stereotypes, and misunderstanding of current army policy (Trobaugh, 2018).

Knowing the views of gay and lesbian senior leaders is necessary because of the potentially deleterious impact of inequality of sexual identity on the career paths of sexual minorities (Macoukji, 2013). Sexual minorities experience job obstacles because of their sexual orientation. A study conducted by Gates (2011) found that in 2007, 10% of gay, lesbian, or bisexual employees were denied promotion due to their sexual orientation.

Eighteen percent of gay, lesbian, and bisexual workers reported discrimination in applying for or retaining jobs in 2000 (Gates, 2011). Current research explores factors that may contribute to the high prevalence of discrimination reported by gay and lesbian workers and better understand the essence (or form) of discrimination experienced by sexual minorities. A movement in research circles also investigates interpersonal evaluations of gay and lesbian senior leaders in managerial roles and the underlying mechanism (Macoukji, 2013).

**Gender bias.** Leadership styles are perceived differently among men and women and subsequently create a barrier for women as they pursue leadership positions. These differences create a gender bias where an overall concept of leadership is tightly coupled with a person’s gender expression. Expectations are subsequently formed at the intersection of gender and leadership because each is socially constructed and rewarded (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Gender bias and the resultant
barriers likely contribute to women’s aspirations and equal access to pursuing and attaining leadership roles. The conventional characteristics of women include being more communally focused (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). A culturally prescriptive gender standard relegates women to specific leadership roles and avoids actions that do not conform with the existing female leadership norm (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007).

On the other hand, men’s gender roles converge on what is viewed as ideal leadership features like assertiveness, power, and trust (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). Therefore, men are readily aligned in the workplace with a think boss, think guy ethos (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). Gender stereotypes and gender bias impact the role women perform in the workplace and the perceptions of leadership positions (Knies, 2019). Researchers found women are viewed as lacking leadership qualities by others and are defined by others using negative leadership characteristics such as being too emotional and possessing poor quantitative skills (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998).

**Gender role beliefs.** Among the essential internalized social and cultural ideals are basic assumptions regarding gender roles and activities considered appropriate for men and women (Corrigall & Konrad, 2007; Eagly, 1987; Eccles et al., 1983). People with conventional gender views tend to accept that women should serve as mothers and homemakers whereas men should be the breadwinners and serve as the head of the family. Research found men more widely share conventional views regarding gender roles compared to women (Brewster & Padavic, 2000; Larsen & Long, 1988).

Traditional beliefs are related to a greater focus on men, husbands, or fathers’ professions than on the occupations of women, wives, or mothers. These values are likely to be embodied in particular people, and men’s social ideologies predicted
potential social positions and short and long-term ambitions (Eccles, Barber, & Jozefowicz, 1999; Eccles & Bryan, 1994). They are also critical predictors of their aspirations and educational and employment choices in households in the past (Schoon & Parsons, 2006; Webb et al., 2002).

The gendered assumptions regarding acceptable social positions influence both paths and resources. These assumptions are viewed as available or socially beneficial and influence associated educational and career decisions young people make related to their desired professional (Webb, 2002). Nonetheless, further systematic research is required exploring the long-term relationship of conventional gender identity beliefs and profession choices (Corrigall & Konrad, 2007). There is a scarcity of research exploring the relationship between typical gender stereotypes with gender trends (Webb, 2002).

**Sexism.** According to Charles, Guryan, and Pan (2018), prevalent sexist assumptions about women’s abilities and acceptable roles influence women’s socioeconomic outcomes. For example, female adults residing in one state but born in another revealed sexism in their birth state influenced perceptions of continued sexism in their current state of residence, which could reduce their earnings. “A woman’s sexism experiences where she was raised, or context discrimination, influences the results of a woman even after she is an adult living elsewhere by affecting the norms she internalized during her formative years” (Guryan, 2018, p. 6). Such sexism increased the probability women would marry and bear a first child earlier in life (Charles & Pan, 2018).

About four in ten (42%) working women in the United States say they were discriminated against on the job because of their gender (Parker & Funk, 2017). Survey results showed women earned less for doing the same job and were more often passed
over for promotions and important assignments. Women were also twice as likely as men to experience gender discrimination; 42% of women claimed experiencing gender discrimination compared to 22% of men. Parker and Funk (2017) explained these variations often stemmed from cultural norms and values related to motherhood, marriage, families, and how girls are raised.

Parker and Funk (2017) also found women were four times as likely as men to say they were treated as incompetent because of their gender (23% versus 6%). Women were three times as likely to report experiencing microaggressions at work because of their gender. Additionally, 15% of working women said they received less support from supervisors than their male counterparts compared to 7% of men reporting a similar experience. Ten percent of women reported being passed over for assignments because of their gender, compared with 5% of men (Parker & Funk, 2017).

Gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is a significant incongruity between one’s self-identified gender and biological sex. The inconsistency must be so severe in social, educational, and other essential areas of functioning that it causes clinically severe discomfort or disability (DOD, 2019). Gender dysphoria is a known medical disorder for which a patient may be diagnosed. People with gender dysphoria may be discharged from the military due to their medical condition. For some, gender dysphoria care can include gender transformation, which may include living socially as the opposite sex without any genital modifications or undergoing hormone therapy or surgery for sex reassignment (DOD, 2019).

The 2016 DOD army branch legislation required people diagnosed with gender dysphoria and who had hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery to enter the army as
their chosen gender without waiver if they were stable for at least 18 months beforehand (DOD, 2019). However, people with other disorders who underwent similar therapies, such as low testosterone hormone therapy, could not join the military without a waiver. The army branch of the DOD strategy for 2018 eliminated this difference. Individuals who underwent either hormone therapy or sex reassignment surgery for gender dysphoria are no longer eligible to enter the military without a waiver. Secondly, under the 2016 regulation, all service members, including members those who are transgender, must adhere to the requirements of their biological sex unless they are diagnosed with gender dysphoria and undergo a sex change (DOD, 2019).

**Sexual harassment/assault.** In military settings, women have traditionally faced difficulties because preparation appeared to reinforce conventional masculine leadership characteristics (Boyce & Heard, 2003). Women experience obstacles such as increased sexual harassment, feelings of alienation, and few female mentors. In hyper-masculine, military settings, one of the most significant obstacles women face is increased sexual harassment (Boyce & Heard, 2003). In war zones, where increased masculinity, increased adrenaline, and separation from sexual partners for prolonged periods intensify violence against women, this danger is even greater (Brownson, 2014; Weitz, 2003).

To avoid escape potential abuse, military women, especially those in combat zones are advised to be vigilant, dress and behave accordingly, and identify a battle buddy, usually a trustworthy male, to accompany them (Weitz, 2003). In addition to putting the onus on women for rape prevention rather than men, these behaviors implicitly reinforce male perceptions that women are vulnerable and need men as protectors (Archer, 2012; Weitz, 2003).
Covert and Overt Discrimination

Many LGBTQ service members were given characterizations of discharge, which were not honorable. Some service members received honorable discharge designations after 1993 when DADT was enacted. Additional notes were annotated on the DOD Form 214, which captures the soldier’s active military service once they depart from the military. The form also identifies the type of discharge a person was granted, which helps determine if a person is eligible to return to military service. It also facilitates jobs in the civilian sector. However, narrative explanations like the term homosexual or codes prohibiting reenlistment were likely to be polarizing and dangerous despite an honorable discharge (Healy, 2016). These service members may be fully or partially excluded from receiving benefits, such as educational tuition aid, veteran health insurance, and disability compensation. Any such notes on Form 214 can result in putting veterans at risk of discrimination, violate their privacy, restrict work opportunities, prevent eligibility for government aid, and limit their right to own guns (Healy, 2016).

Service members discharged under DADT received Honorable or General Under Honorable discharges for homosexual conduct. In 1993 before DADT, discharges that were less than honorable were likely to be obtained by service members found to have participated in homosexual conduct (Miller & Cray, 2013). The dishonorable discharge may have significant consequences for a veteran. In most states it is legal for private employers to discriminate based on discharge characterization, and a less than honorable discharge disqualifies a person from working in the public sector (Miller & Cray, 2013).

Although eliminating LGBTQ bans gives LGBTQ service members a sense of institutional security and improved quality of life, barriers to disclosure remain
The first generation of service members serving after the DADT repeal will influence what it looks like to be an openly LGBTQ service member. These service members will be the first to understand the perceived threats and benefits to disclosure (McNamara et al., 2020).

**Challenges for Women in the Military**

A challenge women in the military face is what Weitz (2003) described as an attitude of a gang of brothers. The military culture stresses brotherhood’s significance (i.e., an attitude of protective warrior) to tackle combat readiness and fighting success (Rosen, Knudson, & Fancher, 2003). Women are then challenged into the admission of such a fraternity. In the absence of recognition among male peers and a similar sisterhood mindset, women develop a sense of competitiveness rather than camaraderie with other women (Archer, 2012; Brownson, 2014).

Pregnancy and maternity leave policies make it difficult for women to meet the demands of the military and parenthood (Bensahel et al., 2015). Pregnant soldiers were treated differently because duty restrictions were viewed as a liability to their unit. Some women were also told to avoid having children to be a good soldier. For those with children, childcare was a challenge. Bensahel et al. (2015) cited a 2007 report from the United States Joint Economic Senate Committee that found childcare challenges impacted military readiness and 37% of mothers in the military missed work because of childcare issues compared to only 7% of fathers. Bensahel et al. (2015) also cited a 2006 RAND study that found 20% of parents in the military were likely to end their service because of childcare issues. Childcare issues were even more pronounced among single parents and families in which both parents served in the military, especially when parents
faced extended separations for oversea or war zone deployments. Time away from family during extended deployments was one of the top reasons parents separated from the military (Bensahel et al., 2015).

Given the limited number of women serving in the military, few female leader mentors are available to advise and assist women aspiring to leadership roles (Archer, 2012; Brownson, 2014). Out of fear of showing favoritism or preferential treatment to women, men are reluctant to mentor women and fear sexual scandal (Archer, 2012). This situation leaves women with few role models or mentorship opportunities, which were shown to be essential elements in leadership growth (Larsson, Andershed, & Lichtenstein, 2006).

**Policy and Don’t Ask Don’t Tell**

Launched in 1993, the DADT strategy was in place for 17 years. The issue lies in the unwillingness of soldiers to adopt the concept of abrogation and embrace reform, with fewer soldiers responding favorably to the abrogation concept of DADT than originally expected by *The Military Times*, a leading independent publication covering most military branches (Military Times, 2012). The DADT policy allowed gay men and lesbians to serve only if they agreed not to discuss their sexual orientation or preference. In 2012, *The Military Times* surveyed the reactions of soldiers to the end of DADT and found attitudes toward gays within the ranks were four times more likely to be negatively viewed by fellow soldiers than positively, with 5% of service members rating this experience as positive and 21% rating it as negative (Military Times, 2012).

Major Margaret Witt was discharged in 2006 after an 18-year career in the U.S. Air Force when she was found to have engaged in inappropriate activity with another
woman. This woman had a husband with whom she had a devoted relationship, and the sexual act occurred at home, miles away from any base. To obtain declaratory and injunctive relief, Witt filed suit in the United States District Court for the Western District of Washington (Madhani, 2007). Witt claimed that DADT violated substantive due process, the Equal Protection Clause, and procedural due process. After being dismissed by the District Court, the Ninth Circuit Court issued its ruling on May 21, 2008, reinstating Witt’s substantive due process and procedural due process claims, as well as affirming the dismissal of her Equal Protection claim. Using the Supreme Court’s rationale in the decision in Lawrence v. Texas (2003), the Court determined DADT had to be subjected to heightened scrutiny, meaning the DADT policy must significantly further governmental interest and there can be no less intrusive way for the government to advance that interest (Burns & Rothman, 2012).

Witt, who had been collaborating with Lambda Legal before bringing suit, was ordered to be reinstated in this case. Lambda Legal (2011) described the result of this verdict by arguing that “to serve in the armed forces, the government should not demand that people fully surrender their civil right to engage in sexual activity with a same-sex spouse” (p. 10). The repeal of DADT and other reforms led to the DOD to rescind the ban of women in land-based combat in 2013 (Kamarack, 2019). Such actions also opened the door for more women and more lesbians to obtain leadership positions in the military.

On the eve of the National Equality March in Washington, D.C. on October 10, 2009, President Obama vowed to lift the ban on openly gay men and lesbians serving in the military, with Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs,
Michael Mullen, in full agreement of their support to repeal the DADT policy (Simmons, 2009). DADT was repealed on September 20, 2010, which was a stress reliever for some and brought increased stress to others. With public opinion, polling showed growing amounts of support for abolition; it may have seemed unavoidable for some to end DADT. Before its 2010 repeal, service members from all branches could have been dishonorably discharged due to their sexual orientation (Elzie, 2010). However, DADT did not require LGBTQ service members to be discharged dishonorably. On a case-by-case basis, if commanders were not pressing for a lower category and there were no mitigating circumstances such as misconduct, an honorable discharge under DADT could be granted to the service member (McDermott, 2016).

When the figures from all military branches were applied, there were just under 13,000 homosexual discharges under DADT (McDermott, 2016). Since its 2010 repeal, nearly 430 cases of same-sex relationships were reviewed by the U.S. Navy, including the U.S. Marines, and slightly more than 300 discharges were upgraded. The U.S. Army received almost 300 requests from soldiers discharged under DADT or its predecessor policies, and approved 200 requests. However, less than 8% of veterans discharged from the service under DADT have sought to upgrade their discharges from their record to honorable or remove references to their sexual orientation (McDermott, 2016).

**Transition to integration.** Despite warnings by gay ban proponents, the transition to openly gay individuals serving in the military progressed smoothly during its first 12 months (Burns & Rothman, 2012). In the years leading up to the repeal, DADT advocates argued open service would weaken the U.S. Military’s unit cohesion and readiness for combat. But no credible research found openly gay personnel’s authorizing
service undermined military effectiveness. Additionally, gay ban proponents continued to make such statements even after the Pentagon issued a detailed pre-repeal survey of service members finding the overwhelming majority of troops served with someone they understood to be gay or lesbian and doing so did not compromise unit cohesion or military readiness in any way (Burns & Rothman, 2012).

According to a Pentagon memo, President Donald Trump’s limits on transgender soldiers in the military came into effect on April 12, 2019 (Richardson, 2019). Prospective soldiers who already switched from their biological sex to another gender may be disqualified for military service. However, the law exempts transgender soldiers who are already serving so they will not be discharged (Richardson, 2019).

**Lesbians who Serve in the U.S. Army**

Although women and lesbians served in the military for decades, in 1993 DADT prohibited them from disclosing their sexual orientation. DADT was repealed in 2010, allowing lesbians to be open about themselves and their sexual preferences. In 2013, women also were afforded to opportunity to serve in land combat zones when the previous ban was rescinded (Kamarck, 2019). Such reforms also opened the door for more women to rise in the military ranks.

The military does not track or publish data on the number of soldiers who are LGBTQ (Kamarck, 2019). Kamarck (2019) cited a 2010 study by the RAND Corporation that estimated 2.2% of males in the military self-identified as gay or bisexual, significantly lower than 3.2% in the general population. RAND also estimated 10.7% of military women identified themselves as lesbian or bisexual, significantly higher than 4.2% in the general population (Kamarck, 2017).
Percent of Women in Leadership Positions

Over the past decade, the U.S. military took crucial measures to create a more diverse and inclusive force drawing talent from around the world (CFR, 2020). However, in parts of the military, particularly the highest levels of leadership, women and racial and ethnic minorities remain underrepresented. Women comprised only 2% of the enlisted forces and 8% of officers when the draft ended in 1973. Today, those figures are estimated at 16% and 19%, respectively, a significant rise over the past half-century, although the numbers differ widely by service branch. In the army, navy, air force, and coast guard, women account for approximately 20% of officers, but in the marine corps women comprise only 8% of officers (CFR, 2020).

Lack of Statistics and Research on Lesbian Military Leaders

Little to no research exists on lesbians or lesbian senior leaders while serving in the military, other than limited data about the percentage of lesbians affected by DADT. The army branch of the DOD does not account for current or previous relevant achievements of lesbians. Lesbians work across all service branches and within the DOD, but there is a shortage of knowledge in the army on openly gay women.

Newly enlisted women receive little assistance related to leadership development (Bensahel et al., 2015). For junior military women in lower-level officer and enlisted positions, mentoring can help them succeed in the military. Mentoring can help women overcome military-specific challenges and support their transition to civilian jobs after separating from the military. Although the number of women in senior leadership roles in the military increased dramatically in the past 35 years, their numbers remain small (Bensahel et al., 2015).
Summary

Chapter II summarized and described women’s history in leadership, women in the workforce, and women serving in the military, both as heterosexuals and lesbians. Challenges and barriers were reviewed, and potential strategies lesbians and lesbian military leaders employ to engage in a successful career throughout service were presented. In addition to difficulties at the highest levels of leadership, lesbians at all service levels share many challenges related to retention and advancement, parenthood and family, mentorship and career growth, and the workplace climate (Bensahel et al., 2015). In the U.S. military, women are an ever-increasing force. Although their positions and duties were restricted in previous decades, women and lesbians increased in both absolute numbers and proportional representation in each military branch (Bensahel et al., 2015).

This increase was fueled by multiple policies and reforms (Bensahel et al., 2015). In 2010, DADT was repealed, allowing lesbians to openly serve in the military. In 2013, the Pentagon lifted the ban on women serving in ground-combat units. In 2015, the Pentagon introduced a sexual preference to the principle of Military Equal Opportunity, shielding gay troops and servicewomen from discrimination. The military ended its ban on transgender service members in June 2016, a category that may have included as many as 15,500 service members (Bensahel et al., 2015).

Research exposed women and lesbians serving in the military continue to face challenges due to their gender and sexual orientation as lesbians. The barriers and challenges are compounded for women in a military leadership position.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapters I and II presented the historical and current circumstances of obstacles lesbian senior leaders from all sectors and specifically the military face in society and in their work. Chapter III outlines the methodology used in this study to examine lesbian senior leaders’ perspectives and the types of challenges they experienced while serving in the U.S. Army. The chapter begins with the purpose statement and research questions. Next, the research design is described to demonstrate how the research questions were answered. The chapter includes a description of the population, sampling frame, and the process by which the sample was selected. This is followed by a description of the research instruments utilized, the methods of data collection, and how the data were organized and analyzed. Then, the study’s limitations are outlined along with the procedures used to protect study participants. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methodology.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders and the types of challenges they experienced while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employed to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What perceived challenges do lesbian senior leaders experience while serving in the army?
2. What strategies do lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome challenges experienced while serving in the army?

**Research Design**

According to Creswell (2012), a study’s purpose and research questions guide the research design, which is used to inform the specific procedures, sample, data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods. Qualitative research examines a topic from a descriptive perspective rather than a numeric perspective (Mack, Woodsong, Macqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005). Within qualitative research, a phenomenological approach describes the lived experiences of people who experienced a shared phenomenon. Phenomenological studies attempt to explain what people encountered and how they perceived specific experiences concerning that phenomena. Phenomenological research recognizes the essence of human experience about a phenomenon described by the participants (Creswell, 2012). This study utilized a phenomenological approach.

**Method Rationale**

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the lived experiences of lesbian senior leaders while serving in the U.S. Army. Phenomenological studies address the lived experiences of individuals or groups of people and seek to identify and derive meaning from those events (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). A phenomenological approach was used to help define the perspectives of lesbians concerning the difficulties they faced and methods they used to overcome barriers while serving in a leadership position in the U.S. Army. A qualitative phenomenological research design was the best fit to ensure information-rich narratives that could address answer the research questions.
The phenomenon studied may consist of an experience, emotion, relationship, or event in which the participants shared (Patton, 2015). In essence, phenomenology aims to uncover the reasons for why people think, feel, judge, describe, remember, sense, and behave. The intentional exploration of the researcher of how human beings develop their individual and shared worldviews allows for a comprehensive depiction of lived experiences as a phenomenon (Patton, 2015).

Many research methods could be utilized during this study; however, the final decision was to use a phenomenological approach focused on lived experiences. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a “phenomenological study describes the meanings of lived experience” (p. 24), which provides data useful for initial exploration of a topic. This study drew on findings from interviews focused on input from another person’s experience. One can benefit from this form of study because each individual’s background and viewpoints are based on reasons and opinions.

Population

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a population as “a group of elements or cases, be they individuals, objects or incidents, which conform to particular criteria that we expect to generalize the research results” (p. 129). The intended population of this study was lesbians serving in a senior leadership role in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense (DOD). As of 2008, 70,781 members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community served in the DOD (Gates, 2010). Of those service members, an estimated, 22,945 are lesbians and approximately 8% (about 1,835) serve in the army (Gates, 2010).
The target population within this study is lesbian senior leaders between the enlisted rank of E-6 to E-9 and the officer rank of O-2 to O-6 (Table 1).

Table 1

*Enlisted and Officer Ranks*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Rank Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-6</td>
<td>Staff Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-7</td>
<td>Sergeant First Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-8</td>
<td>Master Sergeant/First Sergeant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-9</td>
<td>Sergeant Major/Command Sergeant Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-2</td>
<td>First Lieutenant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-3</td>
<td>Captain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-4</td>
<td>Major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-5</td>
<td>Lieutenant Colonel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O-6</td>
<td>Colonel</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Staff Sergeant is responsible for the health and welfare of 8-16 soldiers. A Sergeant First Class frequently has 10-15 years of service and is responsible for training and caring for soldiers. A Master Sergeant is the principal leader for an organization and a Sergeant Major is a subject matter expert in his or her technical field. Transitioning to officers, a First Lieutenant usually has 18-24 months working as an executive officer in the organization. Captains command and control 60-200 soldiers with a First Sergeant. Majors serve as a primary staff officers for logistical and operational missions. A Lieutenant Colonel commands 300-1,000 soldiers with a Sergeant Major. Lastly, a Colonel commands 1,500-3,200 soldiers with a Command Sergeant Major.

According to demographics of the U.S. Military, “The Military does not report data on LGBTQ+ service members” (CFR Editors, 2020, p. 9). For this study, it was estimated 8% of enlisted senior leaders and 8% of officers were lesbians. Combining these percentages, it was approximated that 275 lesbians serve in a leadership position in the army branch of the DOD.
Target Population

A target population is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which study data are to be used to make inferences and to which the findings are meant to be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is important target populations are clearly identified for a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher, a lesbian leader in the U.S. Army, met with her commanding officer in July 2020 to explain her research purpose, research questions, and her desire to interview other lesbian senior leaders about their perceived challenges while serving in the military. The commanding officer suggested that although this was an important and interesting research topic, it would be difficult if not impossible for the researcher to gain permission to interview current enlisted service members. As a result, the researcher conferred with her chair and committee members and determined it would be more reasonable to interview lesbian senior leaders recently retired or honorably discharged from the U.S. Army.

No definitive records exist that report the number of lesbian senior leaders who are honorably discharged or retire from the Army each year. According to 2018 demographics, the army had 471,990 active duty service members and of that, 215,834 (16.5%) are women. In 2017, the Service Women’s Action Network (SWAN; 2019) reported approximately 2% of women leave the army each year. Given approximately 15% of lesbians in the army serve in senior leadership, the researcher estimated the number of lesbian senior leaders honorably discharged or retired from the army within the past five years was between 40-50.
Sample

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), sampling is selecting a “group of individuals from whom data are collected” (p. 129). Similarly, Patton (2015) and Creswell (2012) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), purposeful sampling is when the researcher “selects a sample that is representative of the population or that includes subjects with needed characteristics” (p. 138). Purposeful sampling was chosen as the method of sample selection based on the need to identify participants who met specific criteria.

Because of the limited number of lesbian senior leaders retired from the army within the past five years and the lack of a centralized database, a nonprobability purposeful snowball sample strategy was used. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), nonprobability sampling selects participants based on availability and meet the purpose of the study. Snowball sampling is the selection of some participants for a study based on recommendations from other participants; the initial participants are asked to suggest others with similar characteristics who meet the study criteria (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2009). Snowball sampling was useful when communicating with the lesbian senior leaders to see if they could suggest other lesbian leaders who could participate.

The researcher was stationed in Anchorage, Alaska, and networked with retired lesbian senior leaders from the army who helped her enlist potential candidates for interviewing throughout the country. The researcher identified the first few participants through her personal contacts and then used snowball sampling to locate other lesbian
senior leaders who met the sampling criteria and added them to the potential list of participants interested in volunteering for the study.

Upon conclusion of interviews, participants were asked if they were aware of other retired lesbian army leaders who possessed the qualifying criteria. The use of the snowball technique also allowed an opportunity to gain potential lesbian participants’ trust through strong referrals. In addition, the researcher reached out to the American Veterans for Equal Rights (AVER), a non-profit, non-partisan, chapter-based veterans service organization of active, reserve, and veteran servicemembers dedicated to full and equal rights and equitable treatment for all present and former members of the U.S. Armed Forces, especially LGBTQ military personnel. In a phone conversation, this group gave the researcher names of lesbian senior leaders who left voluntarily or retired from the military within the last five years.

For this research, a total of seven lesbian senior leaders from the army who met the following criteria were invited to participate in the study:

- Honorably discharged or retired from the U.S. Army within the last five years
- Voluntarily willing to share their lived experiences
- Ended their career between the enlisted ranks of E-6 to E-9, between the senior officer ranks of O-2 to O-6, or between the warrant officer ranks of W-2 to W-5.

Figure 1 shows the transition from the population to target population and the sample.
Figure 1. Population, target population, and sample.

Sample Selection Process

The sample selection process was initiated by working from a list of honorably discharged and retired lesbian army senior leaders meeting the sampling criteria who were initially known by the researcher or recommended through colleagues. Purposeful sampling was used to intentionally select information-rich participants. The researcher also used snowball sampling to locate other army lesbian senior leaders who met the sampling criteria and added them to the potential list of participants.

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) completed a review and approved this study, the researcher selected retired lesbians who volunteered to be interviewed. The process for contacting the sample subjects was:

- An informational email was sent to all volunteers explaining the purpose, benefits, and risks of participating in the study. The researcher also explained anonymity for participants in the study. The researcher answered any remaining questions volunteers had before participating.
Upon agreement to participate, the researcher scheduled a 60-minute virtual meeting using Zoom. Time was limited to 60 minutes to be respectful of schedules and other daily obligations. Prior to the meeting, the researcher explained the process and e-mailed the following information before the interview to ensure enough time was allotted for preparation to stay within the time frame: (1) invitation to participate letter (Appendix C), (2) Research Participant’s Bill of Rights (Appendix D), (3) informed consent form (Appendix E), and (4) interview questions for review prior to the interview (Appendix F).

**Instrumentation**

Interviewing is one of the most popular methods used in educational research (Creswell, 2012). A variety of interview questions were asked to depict an accurate assessment of lived experiences. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated, “the data collection mainstay of a phenomenologist is the personal in-depth, unstructured interview” (p. 346). The interview technique utilized in this study was semi-structured to allow the dialogue to be more of a conversation than a formal interview process. The questions also contained sub-questions to probe for additional information as needed. Using the synthesis matrix (Appendix G), themes related to women in leadership and lesbian military leadership helped shape the interview questions.

The interview questions were designed to gain insight into the perceived challenges lesbian senior leaders experienced while serving in the army and the types of strategies they used throughout their military career to address these challenges. During the literature review, questions from similar studies related to LGBTQ men and women
were identified, and new items were developed that directly related with the purpose of the study regarding lesbians and military leadership. The interview was structured around the two main research questions (1) perceived challenges as a lesbian leader in the army and (2) strategies lesbian senior leaders in the army used to counteract these challenges for success in the military.

**Artifacts**

“Artifacts are tangible manifestations that describe people’s experience, knowledge, actions and values” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 361). After the interviews were completed, the researcher asked study participants to provide any artifacts that could help or better explain the information given during the interview. Unfortunately, none of the participants provided artifacts.

**The Researcher as the Instrument**

“The researcher becomes an instrument inside the sample during qualitative analysis” (Patton, 2015, p. 22). The researcher interviewed available participants for this study. As the researcher is the instrument in a qualitative study, Pezzalla, Pettigrew, and Miller-Day (2012) argued the researcher’s specific personality, features, and interview techniques affect how data are collected. The researcher identified as a lesbian leader in the army with 19 years of active duty service and her experience could have influenced the participants during the interviews. For this study, the researcher conducted all interviews, data collection, and analysis. Protocols were purposely built into the data collection process to address any potential biases. For example, upon completing all interviews, the researcher provided each participant with the interview transcript to confirm the accuracy and intent of gathered interview information.
Validity

“Validity, in qualitative research, refers to the degree of congruence between the explanation of the phenomena and the realities of the world” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). The validity of this qualitative analysis was increased by using an expert review panel and carrying out a field test before data collection. The researcher used an impartial expert panel to review the interview protocol to limit researcher bias and ensure the questions would address the research questions. Additionally, feedback obtained from participants in the field test allowed the researcher to decide if the questions or length of the interviews needed to be changed in some way.

Expert Panel

To ensure consistency with the research questions, an expert panel consisting of two professionals was formed to further review and refine interview questions. An invitation letter was mailed to experts, each a specialist in his or her field (Appendix A).

Panel member 1. The first panelist held a doctorate from Brandman University, was retired from the Navy, and served as an adjunct professor. Her doctoral research focused on women serving in the military.

Panel member 2. The second panelist held a doctorate from Brandman University. She was an assistant principal at a high school in Corona, California and has experience working with graduate students to review their instruments and data analysis for validity and reliability.

The two experts were selected based on their knowledge of the subject and previous military experience. As part of the validation process, each panelist reviewed the interview questions to confirm they aligned with the research questions and purpose.
After receiving feedback from the panel members, the researcher consulted with her study chair and adjusted the questions to strengthen the interview protocol’s quality.

**Field Test**

Van Wijk and Harrison (2013) believed field tests can add value and credibility to the entire research study. According to Berg (2001) and Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001), field tests are beneficial to help:

- Identify difficult and unnecessary questions
- Decide whether each question will receive an adequate response
- Determine whether the researcher included all the questions needed to answer the research questions
- Record appropriate time needed to complete the interview
- Allow the researcher to practice and perfect his/her interviewing techniques
- Establish whether responses can be properly interpreted relative to the information required

Conducting a field test gives the researcher the ability to practice conducting the interview and ensures the interview questions are clear (Berg, 2001). The more natural events unfold, and the more comfortable the participants are during the interview, the more likely the interviews will result in obtaining useful research data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Field testing was performed on a lesbian leader who retired from the army to identify if the participant could answer all the interview questions. This person was an individual from outside of the sample but who met all the required criteria. One of the expert panel members joined the Zoom field test interview to observe and provide
feedback and recommendations about the researcher’s interview technique, including body language, positioning, and tone expressed during the field test. The expert panel member also looked for impartiality during the interview.

After the field test interview was completed, the researcher asked for feedback about how the interview was handled and whether the participant felt confident answering questions in detail. The participant was asked for her input about the interview style, execution of, and adherence to the interview protocol. This feedback was given as an informal conversation and not in a separate interview. The researcher wanted to know about any areas where improvements and/or modifications were needed. For example, confusing questions, the participant’s comfort level while being interviewed, and knowledge of all definitions were observed. The researcher also debriefed with the expert panel member using the Interview Observer Feedback Reflection Questions (Appendix G).

Reliability

Patton (2015) defined reliability as consistency in measurement over time. Joppe (2000, as cited by Golafshani, 2003) went into detail further and defined reliability as:

The extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under study is referred to as reliability and if the results of a study can be reproduced under a similar methodology, then the research instrument is considered to be reliable. (p. 1)

Coding is the process of sorting, marking, and organizing data for qualitative analysis; the emerging codes are analyzed and interpreted to produce findings (Patton, 2015). The researcher used interrater reliability by sending the data for analysis to an
expert panel member. Patton (2015) defined interrater reliability as when two or more raters read and analyze the data and arrive at the same codes for segments of text.

The researcher recorded and transcribed all the interviews, and participants were asked to review their transcript for accuracy and to limit researcher bias. This method also made the data more reliable and ensured it reflected the participants’ intended response. “The credibility of qualitative methods depends to a large extent on the [researcher’s] skill, competence and rigor” (Patton, 2015, p. 22).

The examination of trustworthiness is important in qualitative research. Seale (1999) noted, “trustworthiness of a research study lies at the core of conventionally addressed issues as validity and reliability” (p. 266). Thus, the interview questions and technique are important for capturing accurate and useful data (Patton, 2015). The expert panel and field test helped the researcher gain experience collecting data.

**Data Collection**

The invitation to participants outlined the purpose of the study, research methods, data collection procedures, possible risks to participating, and how confidentiality would be maintained. Upon IRB approval, the researcher reached out to prospective participants to ask about their openness and availability concerning study participation. Contact information was collected first through the researcher’s professional network and then through snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is when participants recruit others they are acquainted with as prospective participants.

Qualitative data were collected through a series of interviews. Participants who volunteered for the study were sent an invitation letter to clarify details. Interviews were arranged based on the availability the study participants. For this study, respondents
were given a Zoom link and provided a copy of the interview questions (Appendix E). Additional probing questions were used for the acquisition of rich data, which was essential to this research. The researcher asked each participant to read and sign an informed consent (Appendix D) form before each interview. The Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix C) was given to each participant via e-mail and discussed during the Zoom session.

Interviews were conducted using Zoom because of COVID-19 social distancing requirements. Each interview was recorded, and the researcher took detailed notes during all interviews. After obtaining informed consent from participants, the interview dates were set. Prior to the start of each interview, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study and discussed confidentiality and data privacy. After answering any questions, the researcher followed the interview protocol asking probing questions as needed.

After each Zoom interview, the researcher sent a follow-up expressing appreciation for the time necessary to conduct the interview. Participants were also provided a copy of their interview transcript and asked to confirm its accuracy or offer any updates. Once approved, the transcripts were prepared for data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

When analyzing qualitative data, Roberts (2010) recommends utilizing an eight-step approach:

1. Read all the transcriptions, jotting down ideas as they emerge
2. Review several transcripts in detail reflecting on the underlying meaning
3. Generate a list of key topics identified in the transcripts, grouping similar topics
4. Review the transcripts again and begin assigning codes based on the topics

5. From the codes, develop descriptive categories and regroup codes as needed within the categories

6. Abbreviate and alphabetize the codes for ease of use

7. Being preliminary analysis by assigning codes to the transcripts

8. Review and recode existing data as needed

For this study, qualitative data were essential to identify trends and themes among all the participants interviewed using frequency tables. After the interviews, the researcher had the audio recordings transcribed by a third-party transcription service, REV. After these interviews were transcribed downloaded, they were sent to the interviewees to check the accuracy of the information and provide additional input to the researcher. Once the transcripts were reviewed by participants, all the data were read and reviewed by the researcher. The research followed Roberts (2010) eight steps for qualitative analysis utilizing NVivo, thus showing the number of times each code was mentioned. Tables and charts were created to aid in the identification of common trends.

Artifacts

After the interview, the researcher asked each participant for artifacts related to the topics discussed, such as copies of previous assessments, record memorandums, and any therapy statements during their tour of duty. Participants were asked to email any artifacts to the researcher within 48 hours; if nothing was given within 48 hours, the researcher concluded no artifacts were going to be provided and no follow-up was performed. The researcher explained if the images or records were not considered public
information, the names and places would be redacted. Unfortunately, no artifacts were provided by the participants.

**Interrater Reliability**

“Interrater reliability is valued, even expected, as a means of establishing credulity of findings” (Patton, 2015, p. 665). One expert panel member was consulted for interrater reliability. The researcher and expert panel member met to review a sample of the transcribed interview data to check for interrater reliability. The researcher and expert panel member compared their independent data analysis from samples taken and after reviewing the data, adjustments were made to increase the reliability of the data analyzed. The goal for interrater reliability was set at 80% or greater agreement. The expert panel member analyzed 10% of the coding from this study and 80% or greater reliability was met.

**Limitations**

Limitations are the restrictions within the study outside of the researcher’s control (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Several limitations are present in this research, which are important to disclose. The limitations to this particular study consisted of location, sample size, and researcher bias.

**Location of the Interviews**

Given the current Covid-19 climate of quarantining, the researcher could not interview the participants in-person as initially planned. All participants were interviewed via Zoom, which limited the face-to-face contact useful to collect rich data through personalizing and gesturing. To address this issue, the researcher conducted a
field test with an expert panel member participating on Zoom who conducted a formal reflection piece with the researcher regarding her authenticity using Zoom.

**Sample Size**

Due to the small study sample, this study’s results may not represent the entire U.S. Army lesbian leadership population. The sample was 10 honorably discharged or retired army women who were senior leaders and identified as lesbian. The study’s focus restricted the participants to only those who were senior leaders, female, honorably discharged or retired army members, and openly identified themselves as lesbians. The findings cannot be generalized to the greater population. Additionally, a potential limitation included that the lesbian senior army leaders were no longer serving in the military and the results may not be generalized to the current climate for lesbians senior leader currently serving in the army as political and cultural changes about gays serving in the military can change quickly.

**Researcher Bias**

In addition, because of the interpretative nature of qualitative research, researcher bias may have factored into the analysis. Given the researcher is a lesbian currently serving in a leadership role in the army, her bias may have affected the interpretation and results. To limit the effects of researcher bias, the researcher kept a reflective journal to share her thoughts about the study. Precautions were taken to reduce researcher bias, such as having an expert panel review the interview questions. It was important for the researcher to acknowledge the perspectives she brought to the study because she is a lesbian senior leader serving in the army.
Summary

Chapter III detailed the methodology and process used to facilitate the research to understand better how the study was conducted. The purpose statement and research questions was presented. The qualitative research design was explained. The study population was described along with the sample extrapolated through the selection process. Information about instrumentation, validity, reliability, and limitations was also presented. Chapter IV details additional data analysis and presents the results.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

A phenomenological approach was used to examine, understand, and describe the challenges lesbian women face in the army branch of the Department of Defense (DOD). By conducting qualitative interviews, the study focused on the individual lived experiences of retired lesbians in the military with ranks from Staff Sergeant to Brigadier General.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders and the types of challenges they experienced while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employed to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the army branch of the Department of Defense.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following two research questions:

1. What perceived challenges do lesbian senior leaders experience while serving in the army?

2. What strategies do lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome challenges experienced while serving in the army?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This study utilized a phenomenological qualitative method of research. The phenomenological approach was chosen to examine the lived experiences of lesbian senior leaders to understand and describe the challenges they experienced while serving in the U.S. Army. By conducting qualitative interviews, the study focused on the
individual lived experiences of retired and honorably discharged lesbians with the military ranks of Staff Sergeant to Brigadier General.

Semi-structured interviews were used to produce descriptive narratives explaining the participants’ lived experiences, including challenges and strategies recommended. The instrumentation developed for this study was comprised of predetermined, open-ended questions to ensure consistency. Probing questions were developed by the researcher if the conversation needed to go deeper or when clarification was needed. The questions were designed to encourage conversations regarding participant experiences.

**Population**

This study’s population was lesbian senior leaders between the enlisted rank of E-6 to E-9, officer rank of O-2 to O-7, and warrant officer W-2 to W-5. These are considered senior leadership ranks in the army. For this study, it was estimated 8% of enlisted senior leaders and 8% of officers were lesbians. Combining these percentages, it was approximated that 275 lesbians served in a leadership position in the army branch of the DOD.

**Sample**

For this research, a total of seven lesbian senior leaders from the army who met the following criteria participated in the study:

- Honorably discharged or retired from the U.S. Army within the last five years
- Voluntarily willing to share their lived experiences
- Ended their career between the enlisted ranks of E-6 to E-9, between the senior officer ranks of O-2 to O-6, or between the warrant officer ranks of W-2 to W-5
Demographic Data

Interviewee demographic data were collected during the interview sessions related to age, race, rank, marital status, educational level, active during DADT, geographic location, and where they were raised. Per the function of this study, all the interviewees were female. The interviewees were asked to disclose their age at the time of their interview. Five of the seven participants were in 41-51 age range (Figure 2).

![Age distribution of study participants.](image)

*Figure 2. Age distribution of study participants.*

The interviewees were also asked to provide their ethnicity. Of the seven participants, three were Caucasian, three were African American, and one was mixed-race of Hispanic and Egyptian (Figure 3).
Interviewees were asked to provide their respective rank at the time of the interview. Of the participants, three held the rank of Sergeant First Class, two were Majors, one was a Master Sergeant, and one was a Staff Sergeant at the time of their separation from the military (Figure 4).
The interviewees were asked about their current marital status. Three participants were married, two were single, and one was in a long-term partnership at the time of their interview (Figure 5).

*Figure 5. Marital status of the participants.*

The interviewees were asked to provide their highest level of education. Of the seven participants, three had a high school diploma, one earned an associate degree, four earned a bachelor’s degree, and two earned a master’s degree (Figure 6).

*Figure 6. Education level of the participants.*
All interviewees reported being born in the U.S., so the interviewees were asked in which state they were raised. Two interviewees were from Georgia, and most were raised in the within the Southern United States (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Participants home state.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data collection for this research began in December 2020 and was completed in January 2021. It consisted of seven separate interviews with lesbian senior leaders from the U.S. Army. The interviews were conducted via Zoom with women spread about the United States at the time and date of their choosing. This method created a conversational atmosphere for building rapport. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The use of transcripts ensured each response was accurately captured as depicted by the participants. The data were analyzed for common themes, which were translated into key findings. The findings are presented by research question.

Findings for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was: What perceived challenges do lesbian senior leaders experience while serving in the army branch of the DOD?
Each research question posed to the participants was presented with the intent to move into follow-up sub-questions. Additionally, sub-questions were focused on discrimination, DADT, being outed, living in fear, advice, and recommendations that were not discussed within the research question.

The interviewees were asked to describe their reason for serving in the military. A large number of responses focused on family legacy and following in the footsteps of impactful family members. The average of all responses obtained equated to roughly four reasons that motivated the women to join the military, with the most common reason being family legacy and the least common being venturing out and trying something new (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Reason for serving in the military.

The interviewees were asked how many years of active duty military service they completed in the army, which ranged from 11 to 23 years. One interviewee had a break in service due to not being able to be herself during the DADT era. She later returned to the army after the policy was repealed, serving for a total of 23 years. The other interviewees completed 15, 11, 20, and 19 years of service (Figure 9).
Six of the seven interviewees also stated they were closeted during DADT due to the fear of being discharged. Additionally, when referencing ways to be discrete, one participant stated, “I would say I was going to the movies with my sister, but it would be my girlfriend.”

The interviewees were asked if they were openly lesbian on active duty. None of the women were openly lesbian during the time they joined the military; as stated by one participant, “I knew many gay women that were married to gay men for their cover.” The DADT policy was still in effect at the time, so the interviewees could not disclose their sexual orientation without the possibility of being discharged from military service. One interviewee stated,

I would not discourage anyone from joining. I did not enter my time saying that I was gay. Actually, when I joined in 1994 you could not say that you were gay. Then a change occurred with the Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, and even still, it wasn’t safe for us to say. We just knew we were gay, and we took care of each other as best as we could.
Interviewees discussed accounts of having to be discrete and shared several examples of lesbians who decided to marry men to support their significant others. This decision provided the women with financial stability due to the limitations placed upon them by DADT. After the repeal of DADT, same-sex spouses did not immediately receive the same military benefits as heterosexual spouses. For example, due to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), health insurance benefits, basic allowance for housing, and benefits through TRICARE were not received due to the verbiage *spouse* that was in the Act during that time, which excluded same sex partners from receiving the same benefits as heterosexual couples. As of the present day, all same-sex spouses are treated equally.

The interviewees were asked to describe what challenges they experienced as a lesbian woman serving in a senior leadership position within the military. Challenges fell into three main categories, discrimination, fear, and exclusion (Figure 10).

![Figure 10. Challenges lesbian senior leaders experienced.](image)

Participants shared they felt as if they had to continuously compete with their male counterparts for promotions. Several lesbian women also stated their bodies
became physically worn down due to the amount of stress placed upon them as they confronted challenges related to race, gender, and sexual orientation. While referencing a conversation between one participant and her boss, one interviewee stated,

I’m not sorry that I earned the right to be here. I should not be questioned as to my place at the table. You have to constantly put your job before your relationships, because that relationship won’t be supported. I would say, that’s probably one of the biggest hurdles that lesbians who are senior leaders experience while in the military.

**Challenges of race.** Race identification was found to be a factor in each participants’ self-identity, whether classified as Black, Bi-Racial, or White. Participants who were non-Caucasian thought their ethnic identities were apparent, and they were most conscious of having strikes against them as a result of their race coupled with their sexuality. One participant shared her thoughts about three facets of intersectionality, saying “It’s rough being Black, lesbian, and a woman.” Another participant spoke frankly about her ethnic identity, sharing,

Short hairstyles are something used against lesbians. This is because it makes them look more androgynous, as opposed to feminine. The same with other hairstyles that are considered eccentric. I’ve seen dreads being used against lesbians... Because I throw my hair in a bun I’m not judged, because I look feminine.

Many participants assumed their ethnic identity added another layer to their lesbian identity, which further complicated their workplace identity. The following was shared by one participant in regard to her experiences with other gay leaders:
As a female lesbian in the army, I looked to other Black female leaders and I would talk to them. Some I knew were gay and would just nod and keep it moving. But they made sure that I knew how I needed to act and what I needed to do to be successful in this organization... And that is how I think most of us survived.

Lastly, a participant stated,

The majority of them were males in my organization and it’s like, what is the problem? I sometimes felt that my voice was not heard. Even though this was the position that you selected me for, I felt at times my judgment was questioned. My counterpart could say anything, and it wasn’t questioned… that in itself is not right.

**Challenges of gender.** The female participants described their identity as a woman superseded their sexual identity as a lesbian and was often a more significant factor in their perceived position and identity as leaders in the workplace. Although the relationship between gender and lesbian identity was found to be interrelated, each resulted in separate and distinct workplace interactions. An overwhelming majority of interviewees noted that being female, and the expectations that accompany that gender, were major obstacles for them to overcome while serving in the military. Four interviewees felt they had to repeatedly prove themselves to be just as good as the male soldiers and show they were equal, while the males did not experience the same pressures. One participant disclosed,

Lesbian women are outnumbered in the military. I feel like it’s a male dominant organization, and we all know that. However, I had one
particular senior leader, who I can say, was kind of like a male chauvinist. A little bit. And kind of biased to women serving in leadership positions.

The complexity of the interaction of gender and sexual identity was a factor for the women participants for different reasons, but their gender took precedence as an identity factor. Another interviewee stated, “As a female, if you have a family, you have to put your family on the back burner. A male doesn’t necessarily have to put their family on the back burner.” The interviewee expressed that men were treated better than women with families and shared her challenges of gender and sexual orientation, saying,

Female chaplains are already an extreme minority. And then to top it off, this was right after DATA when I was outroed. So technically, being one of the very first openly lesbian chaplains it was…I felt like it was the shot heard from around the world in our small organization. It was not good.

**Challenges of sexual orientation.** All seven women experienced challenges due to their sexual orientation. These women shared openly about past hardships. One interviewee in particular was a member of the military police, which is a predominantly male driven force. It was a career where the ratio of male to female promotion rates were greatly disproportioned. She stated,

I felt sometimes that my voice was not heard, even though this was the position that you selected me for me. I felt at times my judgment was questioned because of my gender and sexual orientation… I got married to a man, just so I could have promotion potential.

Interviewees openly discussed challenges they faced during DADT. One recalled, while she was preparing to leave for her deployment and saying goodbye to her
girlfriend, she was approached by her superiors and told, “Be careful what you do right now, because everyone is here, everyone is watching.” Her immediate coworkers all accepted her and assumed she had a girlfriend. Her upper level leadership, however, did not.

When DADT ended, the transition was difficult for some due to lack of trust and uncertainty. As one interviewee expressed, “I didn’t have an open relationship for a few years after the passing of DADT because I was just so used to covering up who I was.” Another participant shared that same concern, explaining,

In 2013 was when my sexuality came to light; it was not by my own doing. Somebody else outed me, and so it spread like wildfire throughout the Chaplain Corps. I instantly received very, very harsh criticism. The personnel manager called me and told me the positions that they had groomed me for, I was not getting them. They were not going to put me in it now that is already an issue. It’s unfortunate when you’re in a position, where people place you in those positions, due to your personal life that has nothing to do with them. But they feel like it’s their due diligence to do that. But they don’t have to reap what comes with that, and that is definitely unfortunate.

Her mood during this statement was extremely heartfelt, as if everything she cherished and worked hard for was taken by something as simple as perception. Figure 11 presents a summary of challenges women leaders experienced serving in the army.
The interviewees were asked if they experienced challenges as openly lesbian women on the active duty in the army. One interviewee stated,

I know several women who walked away… But I know others who, I want to say the majority of the ones that I know, hung on by the skin of their teeth to retirement. And, then it was like they could finally breathe.

Another also shared her experience, saying, “It just got to be too much. The weight and the up-tempo of the military is hard enough, anyway. It’s crushing enough relationships.” A number of interviewees experienced several unfortunate situations and said having the opportunity to share was therapeutic.

The interviewees were asked if they served during DADT and to share their experiences. One responded, “Yes, when I was allowed to be me. I didn’t hide who I was. There was no more sneaking in saying, ‘Oh hey, I’m going to hang out with my sister.’ I know damn well my sister was nowhere around.” Challenges described related
to DADT included being closeted, being singled out, leaving the service, and fear of being outed (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Served during DADT challenges.

Common Themes and Patterns in Response to the Research Question One

Comparative findings and data analysis of challenges lesbian women face in the army branch of the DOD are presented in Table 2. General themes emanated from the interview responses related to Research Question 1.
Table 2

*Challenges Lesbian Senior Leaders Experienced while Serving in the Army*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Being closeted  | • When I joined in 1994 you could not say you were a lesbian. You had to act as if you were not yourself. Then a change occurred with the Don't Ask Don't Tell.  
  • When I first joined the army, we used to tell people that we were going to the movies, just so we could go to the gay club.  
  • I had to pretend like I'm in love with some guy when I first came in.  
  • After DADT was repealed it was probably still another year or two before I finally had a relationship.                                                                 | 18        | 5  |
| Being outed by  | • It shouldn’t matter who I’m sleeping with or who my relationship is with. Yes, it was a surprise to some people who I am.  
  • I was told by superiors to be careful what you do because everyone is around. Like they all knew my sexual orientation, they all accepted me, and assumed I had a girlfriend. A senior said to be very careful what you do because everyone is watching. | 10        | 4  |
| peers           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |    |
| Being singled   | • When asked if I was a lesbian, my boss’ response was ‘Is this true’ and I said it is, and so they stripped me of my ordination immediately, which left me two weeks to find a new endorsement.  
  • The emotional toll of being out, in, and getting inundated with messages from peers and colleagues.  
  • I was called a liar. I was called this because I preached the gospel and I was like, I’m not lying, I believe the gospel. I love Jesus.  
  • I was the only woman in a class of 350.  
  • I had to put the military first before relationships.                                                                                                                                                       | 16        | 3  |
| out            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |           |    |
| DADT            | • During DADT, some girl wrote me a letter and my uniform got wet. The letter fell out my pocket and I got in trouble because it was from a girl, but I didn’t get kicked out.  
  • It was freedom. It was like okay now I don’t have to lie; I could just be who I am.  
  • A lot of folks were getting married just so they could take care of their real significant other.                                                                                                               | 18        | 6  |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>• It was a breath of fresh air being able to take my significant other to military functions.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• I remember being in Germany, watching President Clinton on TV to say, ‘Gays should be allowed to serve in the military.’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• You still had some leaders who discriminated because of who they are, how they were raised, or whatever their value system was.</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• I have seen short hairstyles as a discriminating factor used against lesbian women.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Dark-skinned lesbians with dreads or short haircuts were discriminated against because they didn’t wear their hair like mine in a bun.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• If you’re not married, you’re never going to get picked up for promotion.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• I married a man because it was the right thing to do so I could get promoted, and I did.</td>
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<td>• I would say I competed with males in a physical aspect, because of course everything was gendered.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If you give your life to the military, you cannot receive the same support that a straight guy would get where his spouse is supported.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Every chaplain was supposed to be on a preaching rotation. Chaplains are supposed to work together in this pluralistic environment. I went to get involved, and I was told, ‘Well, hang on. We’ll get back with you.’ They never got back to me.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• They had a secret vote behind closed doors that I was not welcome to serve with them and not comfortable if I joined the team.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• All these chaplains are kind of just washing their hands of LGBT soldiers saying, ‘I can’t work with you, I’m restricted. Sorry, my denomination said I don’t have to talk to you.’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The decision point for me to end up walking away was clear. There were many rumors and I feel there were many situations that drew a line with the number of people there to support me.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• A lot changed but once [my supervisor] told me that the positions that I've been groomed for my career I would no longer get.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>Example Quotations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having to compete with males</td>
<td>• The biggest thing for being a senior female leader is you don’t just meet the standard, you must exceed the standard to compete with your peers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• I have all these subordinates that were taking a vote and not allowing me to come and work with them.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of family support</td>
<td>• I went deeper into the closet for my dad to retire before I told him that I was gay. It went well at first, but then it didn’t go well, as he had time to absorb it and what it really meant for his career if I was found out and then his self-preservation instinct kicked in.</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• I asked my Dad, did you read the book? We always had a book that we gave a family member to come out with. And he’s like, ‘You’re serving, and you shouldn’t be…you need to get out of my Army.’ We just didn’t speak for the better part of two years.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being yourself; living in fear</td>
<td>• There were many lesbian senior people who are so afraid because of their careers, and we’re talking about field grade officers and seniors.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Careers had already been built; they were afraid that it was just going to be snatched. They watched people lose their careers because it was found out about their sexual orientation.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>• The hardest part of being a lesbian in the army is that it has a lasting effect because I still don’t engage in public displays of affection.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Not being our authentic self is soul crushing at times. It’s good if you are a part of a community that lifts you up, whether it be good friends, your social network, church, whatever it may be.</td>
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</table>

**Findings for Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was: *What strategies do lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome the challenges experienced while serving in the army?*

All seven women presented a number of strategies utilized throughout their military careers that helped them successfully navigate through the multiple challenges they faced. Of those strategies, the most often discussed were mentorship and
networking. These women spoke highly of having mentors they could confide in and having a lifeline to provide guidance regarding promotions and professional development. The women spoke genuinely about the individuals in their lives who were influential during their careers and the importance of how it made them a better person and leader.

Networking gave these ladies an environment to meet other women like themselves with similar DADT experiences who understood the uneasiness and fear that accompanied that time period. These women, when afforded the opportunity, got the chance to interact and build relationships with women of the same interests. This ultimately made the tough experiences better by being able to confide in someone without the fear of being outing.

The interviewees were asked what strategies they utilized to overcome challenges they experienced. The two themes that emerged related to mentorship and networking, with some participants mentioning both themes (Figure 13).

*Figure 13. Strategies used to counteract challenges.*
One interviewee stated, “One of the biggest ones was just making sure nobody knew anything about your personal life. Really having to protect your character, protect who you are and just know yourself right from being exposed.” She explained further this was of major importance because people taking interest in one’s personal life could possibly end up backfiring and causing a person to be outed. Another woman stated, “I take it super serious about how we impact the next generation. If I take this uniform off, this uniform comes with my legacy of who I impacted while I had it on.” Having a lasting impact on lesbian women the participant encountered through mentoring, being able to leave a legacy, and having a platform to provide guidance was monumental to her. She spoke passionately about having a lasting impact and providing knowledge and leadership to junior soldiers. Lastly, one participant in said, “Just because you can get married to the same sex does not mean that you should go out and get married to somebody that you're not in love with.” She explained some lesbian women were resorting to marrying men in hopes of concealing their true desire for women. It made it easier to limit being confronted with uncomfortable questions about significant others and not running the risk of being judged or treated differently by seniors and peers.

The interviewees were asked what available resources were present when serving in army. Six of seven interviewees shared they had no available resources to help them throughout their journey while serving as a lesbian leader. The remaining participant remarked her friends and peers were utilized as positive resources.

The interviewees were asked if they witnessed lesbian senior leaders walk away due to challenges being too overwhelming, and if so, to explain what they knew about those challenges. Two of five interviewees walked away from service due to being
unable to be themselves. Of the two, one interviewee wanted to be open and live her life as a lesbian woman without judgment. Her decision was tough as she absolutely loved serving as a chaplain, but after being singled out for being a lesbian as a military chaplain, that cross became too hard to bear. She was never accepted or treated fairly due to her sexual orientation.

The interviewees were asked to suggest recruitment recommendations for the army for to provide a safe and comfortable environment for lesbians desiring to serve in the military. All interviewees provided a variety of recommendations. The first interviewee stated,

I think we need to put more programs in place. I know a lot of us hear about the sister-to-sister program or the female mentorship program and things of that nature. They could allow a forum, whether it be in-person or video calls, conferences, things of the sort.

An interviewee who gravitated toward the Chaplain Corp shared,

I think specifically with the Chaplain Corps, what I would like to see is that you are not able to serve as a chaplain on active duty if you cannot serve each and every single person. I feel it’s so damaging for a lesbian, gay, or bisexual soldier who is in need and who is hurting to go to somebody because that is such a huge step for them to want to go talk in the first place, and then that person who represents God to look at them and say, ‘I can't talk to you.’

The interviewees were asked what advice they would provide to lesbian senior leaders currently serving in the army. One participant said,
First is that they acknowledge that we [lesbians] are part of the military. They already acknowledge it, but it’s done very half assed. And now hearing that, the recognition of lesbian and gay soldiers during the month of June and having pride is not part of those things anymore. The army changed Pride month, which was initially the month of June, to Army Heritage month. So, that would be the first thing. Just acknowledge that we contribute positively to the military to show others who want to come into the military that you will be safe, and it is okay.

Another interviewee stated,

I would ask, ‘why did we take the step backwards?’ We were moving in the right direction. We were even allowing transgenders to join the military and transition while in the military. We were so close to having a completely all-inclusive military, and then it all came to a screeching halt.

**Common Themes and Patterns in Response to the Research Question Two**

Comparative findings and data analysis of challenges lesbian women face in the army branch of the DOD are presented in Table 3. General themes emanated from the interview responses related to Research Question 2.
### Table 3

**Strategies Lesbian Leaders used to Overcome Challenges**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Example Quotations</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>n</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Finding a different Career Path | • Get kicked out. Because… she just really could not conform to just keeping things kind of to herself.  
• It’s not a supportive lifestyle to relationships anyway. With relationships when we take off the uniform, it’s relationships that sustain us.  
• I know several who have walked away and gotten out including myself, but I know others who, I want to say the majority of the ones that I know, hung on by the skin of their teeth to retirement. | 6         | 4  |
| Mentorship                   | • How we improve younger generations, through mentorship, coaching, and counseling.  
• A mentor is going to get you into jobs, they’re going to put your packet in front of the right people, they’re going to make sure you are in front of a promotion board.  
• I think it’s a huge reason why you have senior leaders now that are getting out because it’s not easy.  
• You owe it to them; you owe it to yourself to be who you are. In your own skin, comfortable in your own skin. You owe it to provide that mentorship, so they can see if you did it, they can do it, regardless of sex, gender.  
• I would say the mentorship, or the conversations that may be in the same category of what we prefer the things in nature, it just adds an extra comfort.  
• They gravitated to me, and just being able to provide that mentorship but remaining neutral. | 29        | 3  |
| Networking                   | • The network of other queer people.  
• I did have a good support system with awesome people who genuinely love and cared for me, because of the way I treated them, to include some of my soldiers who I still have contact with.  
• I was told to take my paperwork to this person because they would take care of me and not judge me.  
• I think it's relying on your network. | 9         | 4  |
Summary of Major Themes and Patterns in the Findings

The major themes that emerged were specific to the questions asked and told a story of each participant’s lived experience from when they first entered the U.S. Army through their journey to higher level positions of leadership. Through this study, obstacles addressed by the participants included family, mobility when pursuing change, and assumptions that hindered them. The barrier of becoming a female leader in a male dominated workforce was one of the key concepts introduced by the participants.

Theme 1: Discrimination

All seven interviewees encountered discrimination based on sexual orientation or race, and all participants experienced other discriminatory acts based on gender. Participants had to compete with their male peers, and were ignored or disrespected by these peers and their senior leadership. Several women discussed the hardships they experienced with promotions and not receiving them due to a male dominant organization. Participants agreed that in a military setting, prejudice is prevalent and takes the form of gender, sexual orientation, and race discrimination. It was also claimed all levels of the army have some form of discrimination. The topic of discrimination was widely debated and spilled over into other categories, showing it is a structural issue. Participants shared their personal accounts of what they saw and the tacit prejudice, which did not stop them from steering their organizations.

Discrimination issues raised by the participants through this study included having a family, being outed, and male superiority in the workplace when pursuing promotions. The challenge of being a female, as well as a lesbian, in a male-dominated
workforce was one of the key concepts introduced by the participants. One participant provided an example of discrimination based on sexual orientation, saying,

Our ordination chaplains can tell a soldier, “I can’t work with. I don’t want to talk to you,” and turn them away. For a long time there’s been this struggle to find, they’ve now called it restricted and unrestricted chaplains. All these chaplains are kind of just washing their hands of LGBT soldiers… I think it’s a shame that they’re getting taxpayer dollars, they’re getting a government paycheck, and yet they’re getting to choose who they can and cannot serve with. It wouldn’t happen in any other branch.

**Theme 2: Not Being Yourself; Living in Fear**

The participants of this study reported several incidents of not being able to live comfortably before the passing of DADT. They also experienced uneasiness after the passing of DADT due to living in fear for being themselves. Many of them delayed coming out in uniform until they were comfortable and felt included in the workplace. All seven participants stated they reached a moment where they could not be themselves during DADT and for quite some time afterward. Two of seven participants shared they left military service due to these hardships. One participant shared her experiences with not being able to be herself, saying,

I didn’t want to be that person who was sort of, calling out a bad policy just because my dad was connected to the army. Not being our authentic self is soul crushing at times… If you’re part of a community that lifts you up, that truly sees you for who you are and appreciates your gifts that you bring, there’s nothing more healing than that.
Theme 3: Don’t Ask Don’t Tell

All of the participants interviewed were enlisted in the army during DADT. Four of seven women witnessed several contract marriages, lesbians marrying med just to keep up appearance or to care for their real significant other. Another participant chuckled softly as she reminisced on her time in service during DADT, saying, “We would leave our military IDs in the car underneath the floor mat, and just use our driver’s license to go into clubs and we would have a blast.”

All participants had different experiences with the friends with whom they served. “My friends and my mentor were investigated. Before DADT, the army actually got a little bit better and the investigations stopped.” Participants stated how they felt, after the passing of DADT, and one memorable statement was,

It was freedom. It was like now no more lies. It’s okay to just be who you are. Like having a veil lifted. You could just be yourself. There was no more worrying about somebody taking my career from me because I’m gay. I just went ahead and continued to live life.

Theme 4: Competing with Males

Three of seven women made statements in reference to competing with males. A participant stated,

The biggest thing for being a female lesbian senior leader is that you always have to try to make yourself known. Not just meet the standard, but you have to meet the standard and beat every other male that’s in your peer group…You have to be above the best. If you’re a female, you have
to do the extra and I think that’s why. Women will really break their body
down just trying to be seen.

Another participant responded with, “When I pinned Master Sergeant, I’ve never
had so many males come at me from every angle… I can go beyond, and set myself to a
high standard when it comes to physical things.” The final participant shared an
experience where she was disrespected by a peer in front of junior soldiers, saying,

I walked into the chapel, and met the chaplain I was going to replace. The
chaplain assistant said, “Hey, chaplain. Chaplain Smith is here to meet
you.” And he had a small bible study going on with maybe 20 basic
trainees. He looked and he was like, “Well, where is he?” The chaplain
assistant said, “No, it’s a she. She’s a female.” He had no idea that it was a
female and he proceeded to look at the soldiers and said, “This is what’s
wrong with the army.” It was in the year of 2002, 2003-time frame. Then
he said, “I’m done. I can’t serve, and I can’t share a stage with a female
chaplain.” That was my first experience my first day on active duty.

**Theme 5: Lack of Family Support**

One participant stated concerns with family support. Her dad was active duty
army and she felt that if he knew she was a lesbian, he would be disappointed. She stated,

I also would really disappoint my dad and potentially hurt his career if I
came out. I went deeper into the closet and waited for my dad to retire
before I told him that I was gay. At first it went well, but then it didn’t go
well as he had time to absorb it and what it really meant for his career if I
was found out. Then his self-preservation instinct kicked in… and he’s
like, “You’re serving, and you shouldn’t be. You need to get out of my army.”

**Theme 6: Networking**

Six of seven participants agreed networking is critical. One participant labeled networking for lesbian women as an underground network. Lesbian women in the military became a tight knit family, navigating throughout the army and building meaningful, professional connections. Focusing on networking was essential for career advancement. Participants were provided with the required tools and encouragement by relevant mentors and role models throughout the promotional process and in their personal growth.

**Theme 7: Mentoring**

Four of seven women had a support system. A participant described the support system as a close-knit family. One woman stated, “This is how you identify each other as being lesbian.” Two of seven participants had mentors they looked up to as a protector. One participant stated,

I would say having the mentorship, or the conversations with us that may be in the same category of what we prefer the things in nature, it just adds an extra comfort.

Another participant looked at mentorship in a deeper way, sharing, “Not just a mentor, but they become an advocate... Your mentor is going to get you into jobs... I mean, mentors are a great leader for soldiers that deserve it.”
Theme 8: Advice to the Army

The participants had strong touch points for the army when it came to equality for all and doing away with any potential covert or overt discrimination. The participants gave positive advice and constructive criticism. A participant added, “Having a campaign for LGBTQ Americans, an advertising campaign, where they see themselves in the army would beneficial.” One participant proposed a question, in reference to LGBTQ Pride month being changed to Army Heritage Month. Another participant added, Acknowledgement that we do contribute positively to the military to show others who want to come and make the military their career that you will be safe in it is okay. How do we keep our lesbian and gay soldiers safe, how do we do that now?

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings of this phenomenological study. The study explored the lived experiences of lesbian women senior leaders in terms of challenges they faced and strategies they utilized to overcome those challenges, such as relying on mentorship, networking, and professional military advice. The sample consisted of seven females retired or honorably discharged from the U.S. Army.

Interviews asked demographic questions, history questions, and two study questions. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using an electronic device. The data were coded and developed into themes that resulted in the findings for the two research questions. A thorough examination of the data and how it relates to the literature, conclusions, and suggestions for future research are included in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V provides a recount of the methodology used for this study, purpose of the study, research questions, the population, and sample. Chapter V also summarizes the results and examples of how these results relate to the literature. A summary of the major findings is provided, in addition to unexpected findings. The researcher also provides conclusions based on the research findings. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for future research and reflections.

Methodology

This research utilized a qualitative phenomenological method to obtain descriptions of the lived experiences of lesbian senior leaders in the army. The study population was lesbian senior leaders who retired from the U.S. Army within the last five years. To ensure accuracy, the instrument designed for this study used predetermined, open-ended questions to capture a rich narrative.

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders and the challenges they experienced while serving in the U.S. Army. A secondary purpose was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employed to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the army. For this study, the sample was seven lesbian senior leaders who previously served within the army. The original sample was intended to be 10, but the interviewer narrowed it down to seven due to repetitive responses in the interviews.
Findings

Finding 1: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Face Multiple Variations of Discrimination based on Sexual Orientation and Gender

The data collected from the interviews revealed the majority of participants experienced discrimination involving both sexual orientation and gender. Four of the seven women shared experiences of the hardships they faced while on active duty. Some of these hardships consisted of receiving criticism based on sexual orientation while being the only lesbian within an organization and not having their voices heard because of their gender or sexual orientation.

A majority of the women spoke with various emotions ranging from pain to disappointment and displayed a sense of relief to have an opportunity to share their experiences. These women spoke with ease and were extremely comfortable sharing their accounts. As they reflected on the good and unfortunate times of serving in the army, several of the women noted discrimination did not define who they were as a leader. Still, these barriers made it extremely difficult to excel in their careers.

Finding 2: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army often Live in Fear due to the Consequences of their Sexuality Identity

The seven lesbian senior leaders interviewed in this study lived in fear due to their sexual orientation during their time serving in the army under Don’t Ask Don’t Tell (DADT). Two of the seven women walked away from the army due to being ostracized and the stress of knowing they could possibly be removed from service based on their sexual orientation. Of the two participants who walked away, one received unrelenting, harsh criticism from her peers while serving as a religious leader. On one occasion, she
learned her senior leaders were stating she would not be stationed with her wife, which she knew was backlash as a result of her sexual orientation. This incident took place after the repeal of DADT. Instead of continuing service, this participant decided her family and mental wellbeing were more important and departed the army. Leaving the military was one of the most challenging decisions she had to make. In the interview, she shared she was passionate about serving her soldiers, but could no longer bear to live in fear or carry the weight of discrimination any longer. The other participant left military service during DADT and returned after the repeal. She felt as though this was the change that would allow her to be a soldier, while also being comfortable in her skin as a lesbian senior leader. She retired at the rank of Major.

Finding 3: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army find it Difficult to be True to their own Sexually Identity

Four of the seven women stated they witnessed moments where lesbians were not true to their sexual identity. In particular, one example was of a participant who was assigned to the military police, a predominantly male-driven force. She married a man in hopes of appearing heterosexual because she felt this was the only way to be selected for promotion by her senior leaders. Due to discrimination she had faced in the past, she feared that if the Department of the Army Centralized Board for Promotions knew she was married to a woman, it would hinder promotion potential. In a separate account, another participant stated after the repeal of DADT, she was still hesitant and often declined to enter into a same-sex relationship or display any type of public affection due to the closeted life she led under DADT. The mental strongholds of the former DADT policy resulted in her feeling trapped and never able to fully be her authentic self.
Finding 4: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Serving during DADT Shared Common Experiences to Avoid being Found Out

Three of the seven participants attested to lesbians who entered into contract marriages with men to obtain additional income and provide financial support to their significant others during DADT. As one participant reminisced, she recalled how she and a friend would go to gay clubs during DADT, hide their military identification cards, and only show their driver’s license so they could have a social life outside the military. They purposely had to hide their military identification cards to keep their sexualities concealed. These women laughed about the extremes they witnessed and went through just to be themselves. One participant stated her first organization in the army was full of lesbians and it was a unique first experience being in an environment where everyone had a shared commonality. Lastly, a participant smiled as she spoke of her first senior leader, who also was a lesbian during DADT. She explained how although she was mean, she always tried to be caring for her and other soldiers like her.

Finding 5: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Serving during DADT Believed they would have Equality after DADT was Rescinded

Five of the seven women expressed the unexpected disappointment they experienced after the repeal of DADT. Several lesbians still experienced discrimination. One participant was outed and treated poorly by senior leaders. She was not accepted by her peers and did not have the positive experience expected after the repeal. Another participant witnessed lesbians with short hairstyles and dreadlocks being targeted by seniors because these hairstyles were perceived as worn by more masculine lesbians.
Others witnessed lesbian peers leaving the military service due to the hardships of coming out, followed by the inability for them to be accepted in the workplace.

**Finding 6: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army feel Pressured to Compete with Males by Working Harder to Outshine their Male Counterparts**

Four of the seven women stated they had to continually compete with males and hold themselves to a higher standard due to not being a feminine, heterosexual woman. One participant said she had to fight for her voice to be heard as a lesbian senior leader operating within a position for which she was chosen. These women also expressed frustration with their bodies’ physical breakdown after dealing with large amounts of stress for prolonged periods while serving. The constant battle of fighting for promotion as a woman and as a lesbian was never-ending and eventually took a toll on many of them.

**Finding 7: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army feel they Lack Support within the Military and their Families**

One participant recalled how devastating it was to be an active duty army soldier during DADT and to come out as a lesbian to her father, who was also serving at that time. Her father’s beliefs stood firm on the DADT policy. He was unaware his daughter, who followed in his footsteps, was a lesbian. Upon finding out, words were exchanged, which ultimately ended with him saying she should not serve in the army. It was perceived that his commitment to the military and its policies appeared to be greater than his commitment to his daughter, and this altercation led to the two of them becoming estranged for the next two years.
Most of the participants also shared throughout their interviews examples of a lack of support from the military. Four of seven women felt they had a lack of support from leadership and the army itself. One area involved a delay in benefits to same sex couples in which the benefits were not immediate as they were for heterosexual couples. In addition, there was no support for lesbians or lesbian leaders when dealing with their sexual orientation and trying to be themselves. Not having this support was significant for these women and was talked about passionately throughout the interviews by four participants. Having an environment where they could be comfortable being themselves was not common to these participants.

**Finding 8: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Build up and Look out for one Another**

All seven women interviewed mentioned networking was a critical piece to their ability to survive their service time. Meeting people like themselves and building a tight-knit family to protect each other was monumental for their success. One participant labeled the experience the underground network. Everyone who knew about this underground network were lesbian and looked after one another. These women spoke highly of networking and how it helped them navigate through their military careers. Many of them voiced how it still helps them in life after the military.

**Finding 9: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army who Network with one another Build Mentorships, which Leads to Multiple Support Systems**

All the lesbian participants spoke about the importance of having mentorship programs to provide a support system for young lesbian leaders and soldiers by giving them an example to emulate. One woman mentioned it should be a sister-sister program
that offers an outlet to discuss hardships lesbians experience and help them overcome these hardships by identifying practical ways to navigate the army.

**Finding 10: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army have Strong Touch Points for the Army on how to Prevent Potential Covert or Overt Discrimination**

Each lesbian senior leader participant shared examples about how the army could better serve minority and lesbian soldiers. Participants felt the army could better serve lesbian soldiers by recognizing lesbian and gay soldiers during the month of June as it was an observance month previously, but was taken away and replaced with Army Heritage Month. Participants also stated acknowledging lesbian soldiers and minorities contributions and ensuring a safe environment could encourage others to make the military their career. Additionally, the participants recommended an advertising campaign for LGBTQ Americans where they see themselves in the military.

**Unexpected Finding 1: Discrimination Occurs in Chaplin Corp**

An alarming finding during this research was that army chaplains were given the option to choose whom they served based on the sexual orientation of the soldier. One participant explained soldiers could be turned away and the Chaplain Corps had restricted reports, which consisted of chaplains who refused to see LBGTQ soldiers. The unrestricted chaplains would see all soldiers regardless of sexual orientation. For a soldier to seek religious advice, they would have to inquire whether the chaplain would be willing to speak to them due to their religious beliefs. If soldiers were turned away, they would have to continue to look for a chaplain that was willing to talk with them or seek additional services from other agencies.
Unexpected Finding 2: There is a Lack of Demographic Data for LGBT Soldiers

The second unexpected finding was the fact the last demographic data recorded on LGBTQ service members was the RAND study in 2015. Since that time, no documentation was found stating how many LGBTQ service members are currently serving. Also, no other demographic information was found to provide an accurate snapshot of the number of LGBTQ soldiers currently serving in the army.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, and as supported by the literature, several conclusions were drawn regarding the lived experiences of lesbian senior leaders serving in the United States Army.

Conclusion 1: Discrimination Remains a Present Issue for Lesbian Senior Leaders Serving in the Army

Based on the findings from this study, discrimination is still a present concern for lesbian senior leaders. This discrimination exists in male-dominant workplaces throughout the army. According to the demographics from 2018 (DOD), women senior leaders are outnumbered by males and women in the army represent only 15% of all soldiers and women are still underrepresented across the U.S. military. Given LGBTQ members are absent within the reported demographics, the numbers of women leaders consist of all women regardless of sexual orientation. Currently, there is no way to accurately count the number of lesbian women serving in the army. The last recorded data for LGBTQ soldiers was in a RAND study 2015. Despite their growing numbers, servicewomen still face gender discrimination and an alarming number are victims of sexual harassment and assault (McKay, 2019). Other issues keep recruitment and
retention of women in the military low, such as body armor being made for men and needing to be customized for women (McKay, 2019).

**Conclusion 2: Army Lesbian Leaders Encountered Varied Military Experiences**

Based on the findings of this study, some army lesbian senior leaders live their lives openly and happy. Others, however, still have reservations about being themselves due to the traumatizing experience during DADT. Some women experienced no discrimination but witnessed others around them endure unjust hardships. Each person had a story that displayed different experiences with unique outcomes.

All the women perceived the army differently. Respondents utilized different approaches to resolve their challenges, such as avoidance, confrontation, denial, forgiveness, rising above, and learning from their challenges. This aligned with research that found women attempted to adjust to societal expectations that could result in questioning their gender identity (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). Additionally, female veterans tended to report poorer overall physical and mental health following their return from recent conflicts such as Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, and Operation New Dawn (Albright et al., 2019).

**Conclusion 3: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army no Longer Fear being Discharged Under DADT**

Based on the findings from this study, lesbian senior military leaders live comfortably as their authentic selves. The majority of lesbian leaders are comfortable with who they are and confident in their sexual orientation. They are enjoying life with their significant others without being scrutinized and judged by peers and co-workers. These women reflected on how difficult serving under DADT was but are grateful
change happened. They were able to experience it, the good, bad, and indifferent. LGBTQ service members want a military environment in which they do not face different expectations, fewer promotions, limited access to resources, or have their integrity question because of their sexual orientation (Myers, 2020). The uneasiness they felt was also found by Myers (2020) whose participants “noted a reluctance to disclose their LGBT identity due to the fear that they could be negatively affected, despite repeal of anti-LGBT policies” (p. 2). These fears did not stem from actual experiences, but the idea it was not safe to be open about their sexuality (Myers, 2020).

**Conclusion 4: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Leave the Military as a Result of Overt and Covert Discrimination**

Two lesbian senior leaders in this study walked from their military careers due to covert and overt discrimination. These women chose their happiness over dealing with the criticism associated with their sexual orientation while serving. They decided to separate from the military and start a new life with people who loved, supported, and accepted them. The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center (CVLC, 2020) reported despite the repeal of DADT, discrimination from leaders and peers remained commonplace. Further, “LGBTQ service members may face greater punishments for the same minor offense compared to their heterosexual peers. Some are administratively discharged, and others are even court-martialed” (CVLC, 2020 para. 13).

**Conclusion 5: The Military should Encourage Equality and Ensure its Enforcement for all Women**

The army has become more diverse and more women are joining the military as a career. According to Robinson (2020),
Today’s Military is much more integrated along gender lines than at any
time in the past. Women are no longer excluded from any combat mission:
They are pilots and vehicle drivers and mechanics and infantry officers.
But while the U.S. military today has never had a higher fraction of
women, they remain just 16 percent of the total force. (p. 2)

With greater numbers joining the military and the contributions women make to
the service, the army and other military branches should look for ways to increase
equality to ensure the safety of servicewomen.

**Conclusion 6: The Military Needs to Encourage More Resources for LGBT Soldiers**

In reference to resources for LGBTQ soldiers, participants stated there are no
specific resources for them. However, Holguín (n.d.) described four resources available
to LGBTQ servicemembers and their families. One such resources was Military One
Source, which was described as,

- A confidential DOD-funded program providing comprehensive
  information on every aspect of military life at no cost to active duty,
  National Guard, and Reserve members and their families. Information
  includes, but is not limited to, deployment, reunion, relationships, grief,
  spouse employment, and education, parenting and childhood services. It is
  a virtual extension to installation services. (Holguín, n.d., para. 12)

**Conclusion 7: The Military Should Provide Avenues to help Soldiers who Decide to
Openly Identify as Lesbian**

Based on the findings from this study and as supported by the literature, resources
are needed to assist soldiers with the transition of coming out while serving in the army

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and to help them prepare for the difficulties they may face. Most often, many of these soldiers need an outlet and someone to confide in whom they trust, and these resources could be the support they need. Myers (2020) also found a reluctance of LGBTQ soldiers to be openly gay because of potential negative consequences, so this provides an opportunity for the army to make the transition easier and more comfortable.

**Conclusion 8: Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Need Avenues to Talk about their Experiences and Receive Advice from Others**

Based on the results of this study, the relationships lesbian senior leaders made while serving in the army were extremely important to their success and ability to build connections. All participants described mentors, friends, and relationships they made during their careers as their greatest motivators. The army conducted a focus group prior to the repeal of DADT to see how army soldiers felt about the repeal and allowing LGBTQ to serve. “The 2010 focus groups were designed to document the range of opinions among military personnel on various topics, including diversity in the military, how the military manages diversity, and gay men and lesbians in the military” (RAND, 2010, p. 3). However, little data has been collected since.

**Conclusion 9: The Army should Create Mentorship Programs for both Women and Lesbian Soldiers Entering the Army**

Mentoring was a way participants could make a difference in their lives, careers, and the careers of their subordinates. Five participants shared experiences about the difference mentors made in their lives. According to Hearns (2019), mentoring and support groups are beneficial for parents, widows, LGBTQ servicemembers, and others, and can help people overcome challenges and build resilience. This study showed
mentoring works. Thus, it should be extended to women and lesbians serving in the military who face discrimination and experience hardships.

**Conclusion 10: The Army should Develop Communication Methods to Gauge how Women are doing in the Military**

Women are a minority in the army and more anonymous surveys should be issued to identify the inequality based on sexual orientation and gender discrimination. In addition, focus groups should be held as a climate check within each organization, with emphasis on male-dominant organizations and sexual orientation discrimination. The urgency of these communication vehicles is important to help minimize some of the concerns discussed within this research and help minimize future concerns within the army.

**Implications for Action**

This section details the implications stemming from this research and suggested courses of action to mitigate the challenges that exist among army lesbian leaders. Based on the findings and conclusions from this study, implications for action were recommended to improve the experiences of lesbian senior leaders serving in the army.

1. The army should provide additional inclusion training for women with a focus on sexual orientation and gender discrimination. All military women, including lesbian senior leaders, should have resources to help them navigate the rocky terrain they may face when serving in a male-dominated career.

The military should provide inclusion training for both men and women, focusing on sexual orientation and gender discrimination for all new enlistees.
2. Counseling should be provided to women who experience difficulty being openly lesbian during transition and aid with becoming more comfortable. Develop a program strictly for lesbians to facilitate their exit from the military. Incorporate an inclusion policy and enforce it. Ensure all formations sign the policy and understand the importance of treating everyone equally.

3. The army should conduct quarterly focus groups to spot-check the treatment of persons throughout army. Organizations should have quarterly focus groups to help with guided discussions about presenting concerns and complaints, and minimizing future problems. The military should invest in more resources to help facilitate LGBTQ soldiers with hardships or concerns with military life. All LGBTQ soldiers should have available resources to assist with the difficulties of coming out. After coming out, the military should identify internal installation support groups to help soldiers’ throughout their military career. Such programs would be beneficial for retention of LGBTQ soldiers and assist during key transition points.

4. The U.S. military and governmental agencies should capture the demographics of lesbian, gay, and bisexual soldiers within the military ranks. It is crucial to capture the demographics and presence of LGBTQ soldiers to correctly note the representation of this group within the military.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the research study findings and limitations, the following recommendations for further research are suggested:
• The current research study focused on lesbian senior leaders within the U.S. Army. Future research should include a replication of this study for lesbian senior leaders serving in other DOD branches.

• The current research study focused on lesbian senior leaders within the U.S. Army. Future research should include a replication of this study using gay males and transgender soldiers who served.

• The current research study focused on the female participants’ challenges experienced during service and DADT. Future research should be conducted on the entire female population serving in the military in all branches.

• The current research study focused on challenges and strategies utilized to overcome those barriers. Future research should be conducted on lesbian leaders working in other male-dominated professions outside the military.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

This study sought to understand the lived experiences and describe the challenges women in the U.S. Army faced and their strategies to overcome these challenges. With this study, the goal was to identify the challenges and strategies of each woman. The review of literature explored the challenges lesbians experienced and strategies utilized to overcome those challenges. Through the in-depth interviews with seven female lesbian senior leaders, I derived an understanding of their lived experiences, their challenges, the strategies they used, and the lack of support they received during their time in service. Through these interviews, I discovered each woman had a different experiences as a lesbian senior leader in the army, but were intertwined with the desire to make a difference in ensuring their voices were heard. They had to be strong leaders within a
military dominated by men. Many of the women shared the same desire to want better for junior and senior leaders currently serving. Through this study, I hope to inspire women to become aware of the hardships other women experienced during DADT, their challenges after the repeal, and strategies they utilized to overcome them.

I am overwhelmed with joy that I had the opportunity to speak to such an amazing group of women. I am forever grateful for the opportunity to interview these female leaders. Their stories were heartfelt and showed me how much courage and resiliency these women had to endure and everything they experienced during their careers. Their words and experiences encouraged me never to be silent, to be courageous in my own journey, stay strong, and mentor those junior and senior leaders who look to me to set the example. The main take away is never to forget where you come from, always remain true to yourself, and remember everyone has a story. As a woman currently serving and served during DADT, I can relate to some of the same challenges these women endured. I utilize my pain positively by giving the voiceless a voice and sharing their lived experiences with everyone interested in providing a listening ear.
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: EXPERT PANEL LETTER

STUDY: A phenomenological study on the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders about the types of challenges they experience while serving in the Army branch of the Department of Defense.

Dear Potential Expert Panelist:

My name is Ella Nunley-Spaights, and I am doctoral candidate in the Organizational Leadership Doctoral program at Brandman University. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Marilou Ryder on the unique challenges that retired women in the Military have faced and strategies they utilize to overcome these challenges. This letter is to invite you to participate in a phenomenological research study as a professional expert.

What is the purpose of this research study?
The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders about the types of challenges they experience while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the Army branch of the Department of Defense.

What will your involvement in this study mean?
As a professional expert, your involvement will encompass reviewing and critiquing the research instrument and field test. To prevent researcher bias, and to ensure the safety of the participants, I would like for your expertise in scrutinizing each of the interview questions, and provide feedback with ways to improve the instrument. Upon completion of a field test, I will be sharing the results with you and asking that you review the data to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the instrument and to ensure the interview questions are aligned with the research questions.

If you have any questions regarding this phenomenological research study, please do not hesitate to contact me at [redacted] or by email [redacted]. You can also contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Marilou Ryder at [redacted] or by email at [redacted].

Thank you very much for your interest and assistance in this phenomenological study. Sincerely,

Ella Nunley Spaights
APPENDIX B: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE LETTER

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form. You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Ella Maria Nunley-Spaights a graduate student in Brandman University Dissertation Chair for this study is Dr. Marilou Ryder.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders about the types of challenges they experience while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense. This study will fill in the gap in the research regarding the challenges lesbians experienced and how they overcame these challenges through lived experiences. This study will provide insight on lesbian struggles and display the level of resiliency they’ve had to continue to serve their country. By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an (individual interview via Zoom). The interview(s) will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted (via Zoom). The following questions are components of the research you are helping to answer:

1. What perceived challenges do lesbian senior leaders experience while serving in the Army?
2. What strategies do lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome the challenges experienced while serving in the Army?

Your input would be extremely beneficial to this research with identifying lived experiences and prospective of others.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

You will first schedule an appointment to conduct Zoom interview, then you will take part in an initial one-on-one interview with Ella Maria Nunley-Spaights we will discuss several different questions from your lived experiences which will follow a series of interview questions and casual conversation. You will be asked to review your answers after your interview a Transcript of your interview will be provided make sure your answers have been transcribed and reflected accurately Any changes that need to be made according to your feedback are correct. Your interview is set to be complete in 60 minutes.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

This interview will be conducted via Zoom, a teleconferencing tool within a 60-minute window.
VIDEO AND AUDIORECORDINGS:
This study will capture each interview with an audio recording device so that the research can play back the interviews for transcription purposes at a later time. All audio recordings will be stored on external storage that is protected by password and identified by your pseudonym and date. Transcripts, codified by pseudonyms, will be stored forever in a password-protected database until the work is complete. Interview audio files will be stored for four years on a password-protected platform, separate from the participant identification list; at which point it will be destroyed.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:
I do not expect any risks or discomforts associated with your involvement in the study. If you wish, you can opt to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation without penalty at any time during the study.

BENEFITS:
Your participation in this study does not give you any direct benefit; however, we expect to know more about your lived experiences.

PRIVACY / CONFIDENTIALITY:
The data which you use in this study will be kept confidential unless the law requires disclosure. I will not include information in any report I post that will allow you or any individual participant to be identified. In particular, I will retain your IRB Consent Form (this document), participation information and all data on a secure data storage platform.

PARTICIPATION FEE / PAYMENT:
There is no payment or any other form of compensation for your participation in this report.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY:
Your participation is voluntary, and you may refuse to take part without penalty or loss of benefits. You can also miss any questions that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. AN I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

____________________________________________
PARTICIPANT’S SIGNATURE                  DATE
BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant’s Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMATION ABOUT: A phenomenological study on the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders about the types of challenges they experience while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Ella Nunley-Spights

PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders about the types of challenges they experience while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the Army of the Department of Defense. This study will fill in the gap in the research regarding the challenges lesbian women experienced and how they overcame these challenges through lived experiences. This study will provide insight on lesbian struggles and display the level of resiliency they’ve had to continue to serve their country. By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an (individual interview via Zoom). The interview(s) will last approximately 60 minutes and will be conducted (via Zoom).

I understand that:

1. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research in a personal file locked digital folder.
2. I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.
3. The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding coaching programs and the impact coaching programs have on developing future school leaders. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study providing new insight. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
4. If you have any questions regarding this phenomenological research study, please do not hesitate to contact me at [redacted] or by email at [redacted]. You can also contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Marilou Ryder at [redacted] or by email at [redacted].
5. My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I
may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.

6. No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is changed, I will be informed, and my consent will be reobtained.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

______________________________________

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

______________________________________
Videotaping Release form

Research Title: The Challenges of Lesbian Senior Leaders in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense.

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY 16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD IRVINE, CA 92618

Responsible Investigator: Ella Nunley-Spaights, doctoral candidate

I understand that I may be video recorded per the granting of my permission. I do not have to agree to be video recorded. In the event that I do agree to have myself video recorded, the sole purpose will be for video analysis to support data collection related to The challenges of Lesbian Senior leaders in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense.

I hereby give my permission to Ella Nunley-Spaights to use any photos or videotape material taken of myself during her research. The videotape material will only be used for this research and the videotape will be destroyed at the end of the study. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for video footage of me to be used in this research project.

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Participant

__________________________________________________________________________
Date:

__________________________________________________________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator

__________________________________________________________________________
Date:
INTERVIEWER SAYS:

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today in order to interview you on your lived experience as a lesbian who has served in the United States Army in a leadership position. I am currently working on a dissertation to complete a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership and this interview will be a part of the research I will use to complete the dissertation.

The objective of this research is to explore the perceptions of lesbian senior leaders and the types of challenges they experience while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense. A secondary purpose of this study was to identify strategies lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome perceived challenges while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense.

Your participation is completely voluntary and will greatly strengthen the study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to end the interview or not respond to a question, please let me know. Your information will be kept confidential and your name will be changed to protect your identity. In addition, I have provided a copy of the questions that I will ask for your reference; however, I may have follow-up questions if clarity is needed. The duration of this interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Do you have any questions about the interview process?

CONSENT FORM:

The document I am providing is an informed consent form. It explains much of the information I have shared as well as outlines the benefits and risks of your participation. Please take a moment to read through the form and sign showing your consent.

INTERVIEWER SAYS:

As we get started, I would like to record this interview for transcribing purposes so that I can access it later. I would like to be able to accurately represent your experiences, and at no time will your name be shared. I would also like to be able to video record your interview. Your video recorded advice will be used to add depth of emotion as well as genuine sincerity in your answer. Again, I will make sure that your confidentiality is always kept. Do I have your permission to continue with this interview and record it and video record last question? (Obtain permission and turn on recording devises)

**Important details:**


1. Anonymity (data collection)
2. Length of interview
3. Similar questions will be rephrased as needed to obtain more information

[click “record” on ZOOM].

**Research Question 1:** What perceived challenges do lesbian senior leaders experience while serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense?

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and your career journey that brought you to serve in the Military?
2. How many years of active duty Military service in the Army did you complete?
3. When you were on active duty were you openly lesbian? Please explain
4. As you think back on your career as a *woman leader serving in the Army* please reflect on any challenges you may have experienced as a woman in the Military?
   
   *Can you provide any examples or stories about any challenges you experienced specially related to your gender as a woman leader serving in the Military?*
5. As you think back on your career as a *lesbian senior leader serving in the Army* please reflect on any challenges you may have experienced as a lesbian leader serving in the Military?
   
   *Can you provide any examples or stories about any challenges you experienced specially related to your gender as a lesbian leader serving in the Military?*
6. If you served during DADT what challenges did you experience, if any, that were directly related to not telling anyone that you were a lesbian?

**Research Question 2:** What strategies do lesbian senior leaders employ to overcome the challenges experienced while serving in the Army?

7. As you think back on your career in the Army please reflect on any strategies you may have used to counteract any challenges you experienced as a lesbian senior leader serving in the Military?
8. Of those strategies you mentioned implemented throughout your career which do you perceive to be the most supportive? (Please elaborate)
9. What types of available resources were available for lesbian senior leaders when it comes to resiliency and strategies to maneuver through challenges (Please elaborate)?
10. Have you witnessed lesbian senior leaders walk away due to the challenges being too overwhelming and if so, can you explain what you know about those challenges?

11. What recommendations would you have for Army Branch of the Department of Defense for recruitment and providing a safe and comfortable environment for lesbians desiring to serve in the Military?

12. What advice would you provide to lesbian senior leaders currently serving in the Army Branch of the Department of Defense?

V. Wrap Up

13. Do you have anything else that you think would be beneficial to this study?

14. Do you have any questions for me?

Possible probes that can be added to any question, for clarification:

1. Would you expand upon that a bit?
2. Do you have more to add?
3. What did you mean by…?
4. Why do you think that was the case?
5. Could you please tell me more about…
6. Can you give me an example of…
7. How did you feel about that?

Thank you for your cooperation and participation in this interview. Again, we will utilize anonymity to protect your identity within this research. Have a great day.
APPENDIX F: FIELD TEST PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK QUESTIONS

1. How did the interview feel to you? Do you think you’ve had enough opportunity to explain what you’re doing as a leader while interacting with your team or Soldiers?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok?

3. Were the questions straightforward all in all or were there areas where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you remember any unclear words or phrases that were asked about during the interview?

5. And lastly, did I feel relaxed during the interview?
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW FEEDBACK REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Interviewing is an acquired skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight into your interview skills and having an effect on the interview will support your data collection during interviews with the actual participants. Ask the following questions about the assessment with your ‘observer’ after completing the field test of the interview. As an interviewer, the questions are written from your prospects. Sharing your thoughts with the interviewer and acknowledging their input, however, will offer useful insight to improve the interview process.

1. How long has it been since the interview? Has the time felt opportune? Are the respondents been given enough opportunity to answer the questions?

2. Were the questions simple, or were there ambiguous positions for the respondents?

3. Has any phrases or concepts used during the interview been vague to the respondents or ambiguous to them?

4. What did you feel at the interview? Pleasant? Nervousness?

5. Do you feel able to carry out the interview? Is there anything you could have done to prepare yourself better?

6. What aspects of the interview were the smoothest and why do you think that was the case?

7. What aspects of the interview seemed to be lacking and why do you think it was?

8. If you changed some part of the interview what that part would be and how would you change it?

9. What are your suggestions for improving the whole process?
**APPENDIX H: SYNTHESIS MATRIX**

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